

THE ESTABLISHMENT IN THE EARLY TWELFTH
CENTURY OF THE SYRIAN DA^cWA OF THE
NIZARI ISMA^cILIS

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by
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PREFACE

The subject of this thesis is a case study of the expansion of an extremist sect in Medieval Islam. The popular name of this sect has made an indispensable contribution to almost every language of western Europe, and is still able to conjure up a range of fantastic associations. Medieval chronicles, both Latin and Arabic, depicted these sectaries as a desperate band of fanatical killers of kings and princes, and Medieval travellers gave currency to tales of drugs and paradisaical gardens used to induce young men to become devotees, of unhesitating death-leaps to impress visitors with their blind obedience to their leader: their unswerving devotion has been a source of allusion for Provençal love poems and as great a poet as Dante, while at least one "modern" writer has seen in them the archetypal revolutionary secret society, the embodiment of all evil, duplicity, and moral corruption. (J. von Hammer, Geschichte der Assassinen aus morgenlandischen Quellen, Stuttgart, 1818, English translation, The History of the Assassins, by O.C. Wood, London, 1835.)

The legend which has grown up around the so-called sect of the Assassins easily obscures their historical reality. Accordingly, the first two chapters of this thesis attempt to indicate the outlines of this reality, to dispel any lingering wisps of legend, to trace the movement's heritage in Islam, showing its origins, its aims, the nature of its beliefs and organization and a little of its early history in Persia.

The Persian Nizari Isma'ilis, as they should properly be called, expanded their propaganda campaign into Syria at about the same time as the First Crusade, in the closing years of the eleventh century. The comparison is instructive; the Nizaris were only just securing permanent bases in Syria by the time the Crusaders had lost their first major territorial acquisition, the principality of Edessa, in 1144. Why did the sectaries take so long to get established? Was it simply because of the strength of the opposition they met, or were there unforeseen disadvantages for them in the Syrian situation? Were they perhaps in some measure at fault themselves, in their handling of obstacles and reverses?

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the problem of the Nizari establishment in Syria, to find an explanation for its long delay.

Though much has been written about the "Syrian Assassins", probably a reflection of their proximity to the crusaders, the early phase of their establishment has not received the detailed examination it deserves. By far the best account is that contained in the chapter by Bernard Lewis entitled "The Ismā'ilites and the Assassins" in A History of the Crusades, editor-in-chief, K.M. Setton, volume i, The First Hundred Years, ed. M.W. Baldwin, published by the University of Pennsylvania, (Philadelphia, 1955). The footnotes here are much fuller than those for Chapter 5 of Lewis's more recent The Assassins, A Radical Sect in Islam (London, 1967), which, aside from a few fresh items, is a word-for-word repetition of his chapter in

the Pennsylvania History. The best monograph on the whole sect was written by the late Marshall G.S. Hodgson; The Order of the Assassins; the Struggle of the Early Nizârî Ismâ'îlîs against the Islamic World (The Hague, 1955). His focus, naturally enough, is on the parent Persian sect, and he candidly admits that for Syrian affairs he has relied heavily on already-published studies. (See pp.89, n.20; 185, n.1).

Recent work by Isma'ili scholars in the Middle East has dealt with the Syrian Nizaris, but centres mainly on the rule of the famous "Old Man of the Mountain", Rashid al-Din Sinan (c.1162-1193). The writings of 'Ārif Tāmīr and Muṣṭafā Gālib in particular are said to enhance our understanding of the Nizaris in Syria (see Lewis's remarks in Arabica, XII (1966), p.226) but being in Arabic, they are for the moment closed to me.

The most recent unpublished study in English betrays a similar tendency to concentrate on Sinan's rule. In his Ph.D. thesis (Durham, 1963), "The Syrian Ismā'īlīs at the time of the Crusades", Nasseh Ahmad Mirza treats the period of establishment very briefly in an introduction which adds virtually nothing to Lewis or Hodgson.

To my mind, these works leave unanswered the question I have set myself in this thesis; how did the Nizaris establish themselves in Syria and why did they take so long to achieve permanent establishment?

The sources for the early history of the Nizaris in Syria are less than satisfactory. No works of Syrian Nizari provenance exist for the period prior to Rashid al-Din Sinan's rule, and we are forced to rely on notices of Nizari activity in the general chronicles and biographical dictionaries. Few of these are exactly contemporary with our period, the information they offer is usually brief and fragmentary, and most of the writers, being Sunnite, are heavily prejudiced against the sectaries. The nature of the sources is such that a critical bibliography seemed called for, and though one was actually prepared as a guide during research, it was thought too pretentious to add it to an M.A. thesis which is already longer than it ought to be. There are in any case two very useful guides available elsewhere. The first is Bernard Lewis's article "The Sources for the History of the Syrian Assassins", in Speculum, XXVII (1952), pp.475-489, which offers a brief survey of the sources for each broad "period" of Syrian Nizari history and useful examples of conflicting reports of selected events. Much of this article is derived from the masterly and detailed analysis in Claude Cahen's La Syrie du Nord à l'époque des Croisades (Paris, 1940), pp.1-100, which examines in some detail the whole corpus of source material, Latin, Arabic, Syriac, Greek, and Armenian, for the history of northern Syria in the crusader period.

I should, however, mention the collection which made it possible to undertake this study here in New Zealand.

The monumental Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, (sixteen

volumes, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Paris, 1841-1906) is extremely useful for the student who has no Arabic, but it has a number of serious limitations. Its main weakness is that it does not offer complete versions of the Arabic sources it translates into French. Passages relating to the crusaders are given in full, and there is a wealth of material on Muslim Syria, but the editors give no indications of lacunae, and these abound. Furthermore, the French translations are not to be regarded as fully detailed literal versions of the Arabic; they are intended merely to convey the general sense of the original.

As an indication of the care with which I have used the Recueil, I should mention that I have checked its conversion of Muslim dates wherever possible, using the tables of G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville, The Muslim and Christian Calendars, (Oxford, 1963). The extent to which I have been able to supplement the Recueil with other translations may be judged from the Bibliography. Though it is obvious that I have not had access to each and every relevant source, I personally regard my inability to read any of them in the original Arabic as a more serious stricture on this study.

ABBREVIATIONS

I have used the following abbreviations in my footnotes:

BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies (as the School of Oriental Studies, 1916-1938) n.s. London (1938)-
EI	Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition 4 volumes and supplement, Leiden, 1913-1948
EI2	Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition (in progress) Leiden and London, 1960-
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society New Haven, 1(1843)-
JA	Journal Asiatique (from the 3rd series onwards) Paris (1836)-
JBBRAS	Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society Bombay, 1(1846)-
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. London, 1(1834)-
REI	Revue des Etudes Islamiques Paris, 1(1880)-
RHC	Recueil des Historiens des Croisades ¹ Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles-Lettres Paris, 1841-1906
--- Occ.	Historiens Occidentaux, 5 volumes, 1844-1895
--- Or.	Historiens Orientaux, 5 volumes, 1872-1906
--- Ar.	Documents Armeniens, 2 volumes, 1869-1906
ROL	Revue de l'Orient Latin Paris, (1880-1911, discontinued.)

1. For an analysis of the contents of each volume, see A.S. Atiya The Crusade, Historiography and Bibliography (Bloomington, 1962) pp.29-47.

GLOSSARY

Note on transliteration of Arabic names:

Specialists in written Arabic will detect a number of inconsistencies in my spelling of Arabic names, so I take this opportunity to explain myself. There are several different systems of transliteration to be found in the secondary sources. Where I had access to the original, I attempted my own transliteration, using the International System for Transliteration of Arabic, (Geneva, 1961). Where the original was not available, I followed the spelling of the Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition). In the few cases where even this failed, I have adopted the spelling most consistent with the secondary sources available to me.

Some simplifications have been made in order to render the text less formidable in appearance. For example, - dj - is rendered - j -. Nearly all diacritical points and vowel markings have been omitted; the only survivors are the glottal stop, hamza ('), and the guttural, ain (ʿ).

Where a more familiar Anglicized form exists, this was sometimes preferred, for example in the names of towns such as Damascus (Dimashk) and Aleppo (Halab). The only indefensible choice of nomenclature is the author's preference for Persia instead of Iran.

GLOSSARY of Arabic words used in the text:

asas	(foundation)	the first of a series of silent imams.
banu		sons of, or the family of.
batin		esoteric.
da'ī		missionary, propagandist.
dar		house.
dac'wa		mission, propaganda.
fida'i		assassin, agent of the Nizari Isma'ilis.
hisn		fortress.
hujja		proof (of God)
imam		leader; religious and secular head of the umma.
jabal		mountain or range of hills.
jazira		island.
kadi or qadi		judge.
kasr		castle.
mahdi		the guided one.
mawla (pl. mawali)		client, freedman; a non-Arab Muslim.
nahr		river.
nass		designation of successor.
natiq		prophet; a speaking imam.
ra'is		civic leader.
satr		concealment (of the imam).
ta'lim		instruction, mystic knowledge.
ta'rikh		history.
ta'wil		esoteric interpretation.
umma		people, community.
wadi		valley of a non-perennial river.
wazir or vizier		chief minister.
zahir		exoteric.

Two terms of Turkish origin also require explanation:

askar	the "household cavalry" of a Turkish <u>amir</u> or general.
atabeg	a "father-chief" or guardian to a Saljuk princeling, responsible for his military education and the government of his province until he comes of age.

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CHAPTER I

ISMA^cILISM

Unlike Medieval Christendom, Medieval Islam knew of no theoretical separation between church and state. The umma or community, built on a revealed law and religion, was ruled by a caliph who had power to administer but not to change or interpret the God-given polity. In terms of this conception, any open revolt against established authority was a sin as well as a crime. Social or political dissent could find permanent expression within the umma only in religious forms, and no religious deviation from the sunna, or accepted custom of the orthodox majority, could escape political significance.¹

The sect famous to Western Europe as the Assassins came of a long heritage of radical dissent in Islam. In keeping with that heritage they possessed distinctive socio-political aims, yet remain inexplicable unless viewed primarily as a religious sect.

As a religious sect they are properly called Nizari Isma^cilis, and this name at once identifies them as part of the Shi'a, the oldest and most important formation of non-orthodox belief in Islam.

The purpose of this introduction is simply to trace the origins of Nizari Isma^cilism within the Shi'a. This may sound a formidable

1. B. Lewis. "Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam", Studia Islamica I (1953) pp.43, 58-9. (Hereafter cited as Lewis, "Heresy . . .".)

task, covering some four and a half centuries, but I have adopted a method rather resembling the tracing of one's ancestry on a family genealogy. While the eye follows as direct a path as possible, much of the rest of one's forebears remain in decent obscurity and must be taken for granted.

The origins of the Shi'a must be traced from the death of Muhammad himself (632); or, more precisely, from the leadership crisis resulting from his lack of provision for a successor. The solution adopted became in time the historic institution of the Caliphate, but it seems to have been at the start little more than a coup which had the support of most of the infant Muslim community. The later theoretical justification for the appointment of a khalifa or deputy to the Prophet was the principle of consensus opinion or ijma^c. We are here more concerned with what lay outside the majority consensus.

There appear to have been several groups which did not readily smile upon the choice of Abn Bakr as khalifa. Each of the Companions of the Prophet had his own following, and foremost among these the following of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, seems to have been bitterly disappointed that 'Ali had not been chosen. This following gradually became a focus for those who genuinely felt that the leadership of Islam should have remained among Muhammad's descendants, for the only surviving male line from the Prophet issued out of 'Ali's union with Muhammad's daughter Fatima.

This following was initially known simply as the party of 'Ali, the shi'atu 'Ali, whence came the shortened familiar name shi'a.² In its earliest stage, the Shi'a was no more than a political attitude towards the succession, a "lawful partisanship",³ whose adherents differed in no way from the rest of the umma in law, doctrine, or religious practice. They simply held that insufficient weight had been attached to what they regarded as Muhammad's specific designation of 'Ali as his successor when he paused at Ghadir Khum on the way back from his farewell pilgrimage to Mecca.⁴ The significance of the Shi'a is of course that it did not long remain a purely passive political attitude.

'Ali's claim to the succession seems to have been pressed more by his followers than by 'Ali himself. Most of the other Companions of the Prophet either opposed his candidacy or remained non-committal, and 'Ali may have shared their view at first.⁵ He was again passed over on Abu Bakr's death, but though the nomination of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab as Caliph was the obvious choice of a strong wise leader, the same could not be said of the third Caliph, appointed in 644; 'Uthman ibn 'Affan of the powerful 'Umayya clan.

2. A useful general survey of early Shi'ism is D.M. Donaldson, The Shi'ite Religion, (London, 1933), hereafter cited as Donaldson. For the discussion so far, see in particular pp.9-16.
3. Lewis, "Heresy ..." p.54 (Arabic; tashayyu'hasan).
4. Donaldson, pp.1-2.
5. See M.G.S. Hodgson, "How did the early Shi'a become sectarian?" JAOS, LXXV (1955) p.2.

‘Uthman's rule was weak, fraught with indolence and nepotism. He was perhaps unlucky in that he also reaped the whirlwind of social problems sown by the vast territorial acquisitions of the first brilliant campaigns of conquest. Dissatisfaction with ‘Uthman seemed to confirm the murmured protests of the Shi‘a that ‘Ali would have been a better choice.

Social distress and dislocation was naturally severest in the newly-won territories, and opposition to ‘Uthman's indolent rule came primarily from the mawali or non-Arab Muslims of Egypt, Syria, Irak, and Persia.⁶ Though notions of legitimism were alien to Arab experience at this time, they were familiar and deep-rooted among most of the mawali, and it is possible that many of them saw in the Shi‘a a more legitimate alternative to ‘Uthman's house. The Shi‘a acquired increasing mawali support.⁷

‘Uthman's control weakened as disaffection grew, and in 656 his kinsman Mu‘awiya thought it necessary to send forces from Syria to support the Caliph. Their arrival was anticipated by a revolt at Medina in which ‘Uthman was murdered. This sparked off the civil wars which shattered the early unity of Islam.

The insurgents had promptly acclaimed ‘Ali as Caliph, though it seems he did not as yet enjoy widespread Arab support. Significantly, he moved to Irak, where mawali support for him was stronger,

6. B. Lewis, The Origins of Ismā‘īlism, (Cambridge, 1940) p.24, hereafter cited as Lewis, Origins.

7. Lewis, "Heresy ..." pp.47-8.

and from his capital at Kufa sought to make good his claims by force. This failed, and the arbitration organized after the inconclusive and sanguinary conflict at Siffin (657) went against him. While 'Ali was coping with divisions in his following, Mu'awiya quietly consolidated his position in Syria, where he was proclaimed Caliph in 660. 'Ali himself was murdered in 661, yet his following did not disintegrate as expected.⁸ 'Ali's two sons Hasan and Husayn continued to assert the 'Alid claim, and in the generation after 'Ali's death the Shi'a began its gradual but momentous transformation from a political partisanship into a powerful movement of social and religious radicalism.

'Alid conspiracies against the early 'Umayyad caliphate at Damascus were generally fruitless and short-lived until the death of Mu'awiya gave opportunity for a serious armed revolt against his successor Yazid in 680. Hasan had recently died and it was Husayn who led this rebellion. After some initial success, Husayn was finally surprised by a far superior 'Umayyad force at Karbala in Irak, and he and his male relatives were virtually wiped out. There was a solitary male survivor, the boy 'Ali Zayn al-Abidin.⁹

The tragedy at Karbala profoundly shocked even the orthodox in Islam, but it wrought a deep and significant change in the Shi'a. Hasan's descendants carried on the purely political aims of the Shi'a, spreading widely throughout the Muslim world and setting up

8. Donaldson, pp.33, 35-41.

9. Donaldson, pp.66-69, 73-79, 85-87, 101-2.

‘Alid dynasties as far afield as Morocco, but the remnants of Husayn's family retired into quiet inactivity at Medina, there to reflect on the themes of martyrdom and suffering engendered by Karbala.¹⁰

It is tempting and not unreasonable to perceive in this period of retirement and seclusion a phase of doctrinal incubation, in which a sense of separateness from the orthodox umma began to grow. Already the name Shi‘a had ceased to denote simply the predominantly Arab political party grouped around ‘Ali's descendants. The movement had become larger, more complex, and less easily described in generalizations.

The influence of mawali support had made the Shi‘a a focus for deep-running social discontent, especially in the garrison towns of Syria and Irak. Here, it had become entangled with a multitude of non-Muslim beliefs and ideas from Persian and Jewish-Christian sources.¹¹ It is possible that the movement was also influenced by the revolutionary propaganda of various Kharijite leaders of the time. One of the new ideas affecting Islam in this period which strongly influenced the Shi‘a was the concept of the mahdi, "the guided one of God",¹² who will one day lead a reform movement to end all injustice and fill the earth with righteousness.

10. B. Lewis, article "‘Alids", EI2 pp.400-402.

11. Lewis, Origins, pp.24-25.

12. F. Rahman, Islam (London, 1966) p.133.

Innovatory concepts such as the belief in a mahdi began increasingly to infiltrate the outer mawali fringe of the Shi'a. They not only redoubled the appeal of Shi'ism to the oppressed and miserable, but also speeded the undoubted transition of the movement after Karbala from a party to a religious sect. Even more significant for our present purposes, these ideas created a lasting tension in the movement between the moderate "legitimist" core which stressed the importance of its kinship with the Prophet, and an impatient, extremist, revolutionary wing.¹³

Though it is difficult to be precise in view of the fragmentary and conflicting nature of the evidence, the closing decades of the seventh century see the appearance of a confused medley of ephemeral extremist groups, calling themselves Shi'ite, characterized by the variety of their beliefs and composition, and impatient for more effective resistance to the authority of the orthodox Sunnite establishment.

The abortive revolt of Mukhtar ibn Abu 'Ubayd at Kufa in 685-7 is the prime example of this extremist revolutionary development. Mukhtar hailed as mahdi one of 'Ali's sons by the Hanafite woman; Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya. Even after Mukhtar's defeat and death, his followers retained their belief in Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya as the mahdi. Once he died, however, (700) the following split up. Some of the splinter groups retained the Hanafite claim. One of these groups is very important.

13. Lewis, Origins, pp.24-25.

It was led by Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya's son, Abu Hashim 'Abd Allah, who believed he had inherited the imamate from his father. Though the Hashimiyya, as his followers were called, also split up at Abu Hashim's death in 716, the main remnant was taken over by one Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Abd Allah ibn al-'Abbas. He adopted the original Hanafite claim to the imamate and developed this group into the most active and dangerous of all the revolutionary groups opposed to the 'Umayyad caliphate. In a hard-fought campaign covering the period 747-750 this revolutionary movement actually succeeded in overthrowing the 'Umayyads.¹⁴

The 'Abbasid revolution was of enormous significance for Islamic history; the establishment of the 'Abbasid caliphate has often been taken to mark the final stage of the caliphate's transition from an Arab-dominated military régime to a truly cosmopolitan Muslim empire. The change was scarcely less significant for the Shi'a, because the 'Abbasids, on attaining power, swiftly shrugged off their 'Alid pretensions and became ardent advocates of the Sunnite 'establishment'.

The Hanafiya-'Abbasid movement had been by far the most successful of the Shi'a, but the 'Abbasids' espousal of orthodoxy effectively terminated any Hanafite claim to the imamate. This narrowed the succession to the descendants of Husayn through 'Ali Zayn al-Abidin,

14. S. Moscati, article "Abū Hāshim", EI2, i, pp.124-125; and B. Lewis, article "Abbāsids", EI2, i, p.15ff.

but it also intensified the frustration and impatience of the remaining extremist fringe, who rightly saw the 'Abbasid success as a betrayal of 'Alid aspirations.

The moderate core of the Shi'a now began to place increasing emphasis on the directness of their descent from the Prophet through 'Ali and Fatima.¹⁵ This emphasis soon gave rise to the belief that there had always been a divinely-predestined succession of imams who inherited, by their descent from 'Ali, the authority of sole infallible interpreters of the true faith of Islam. This doctrine of the imamate, which indicates the development of the Shi'a into something approaching religious dissent, was to become as enduring a feature of moderate Shi'ism as the mahdi concept had of the revolutionary fringe.

One vital point was not made clear, however; how was the true imam to be recognized? That there could be room for disagreement over the identity of the imam was demonstrated in the mid-eighth century by the Zaydi schism. Outside the moderate core of the Shi'a were not only extremists and revolutionaries but ultra-conservatives as well. One group of these conservatives, made anxious by doctrinal innovations, declared their allegiance to 'Ali Zayn al-Abidin's son Zayd as imam in preference to his eldest son Muhammad al-Bakir. Zayd accordingly led a revolt at Kufa in 740, which failed. His sons Yahya and Idris, however, continued to uphold their father's claims elsewhere. The Zaydis finally achieved open

15. B. Lewis, The Assassins; A Radical Sect in Islam (London 1967), p.25, hereafter cited as Lewis, Assassins.

success in Tabaristan and the Yemen. Their conservatism may perhaps be judged by the fact that they differ from Sunnite orthodoxy in only a few very minor details; they thus preserve the old purely political Arab form of Shi'ism.¹⁶

The Zaydi secession and the termination of Hanafite claims in the 'Abbasid revolution left the majority of the Shi'a adhering to Muhammad al-Bakir as imam. When he died in 732, his son Ja'far al-Sadik was accepted as imam without question. Under Ja'far al-Sadik, the old tensions between moderates and impatient extremists came to a head in the serious schism which finally determined the sectarian subdivision of the movement.

The imamates of Muhammad al-Bakir and Ja'far al-Sadik appear to have been a period of considerable fermentation of ideas within the Shi'a. Beliefs formerly to be found on the revolutionary fringe now began to be studied by the moderates, and much testing of opinion seems to have gone on.

The name primarily associated with these developments is that of one of Ja'far's leading missionaries, the da'i Abu'l-Khattab al-Asadi.¹⁷ Predictably, many moderates found that they could not wholeheartedly approve of the ideas prominent in Abu'l-Khattab's preaching, and Ja'far was finally moved to repudiate his chief da'i. Abu'l-Khattab had attracted a following, however, and through it his doctrines became firmly entrenched in certain sections of the Shi'a.¹⁸

16. F. Rahman, Islam (London, 1966), p.171.

17. See Bernard Lewis, article "Abū'l-Khattāb", EI2, i, p.134.

18. Lewis, Origins, pp.32-37.

One of the doctrines attributed to him is that of the ta'wil or allegorical interpretation of scripture, which emphasizes a hidden batin or esoteric meaning ahead of the zahir or apparent literal meaning. This doctrine was later to become very important for the branch of the Shi'a with which we will be concerned.

Though Abu'l-Khattab's following split up when he died (about 755) it did not disintegrate. Many of his supporters appear to have rallied to a new leader, the controversial Maymun al-Kadda.¹⁹ It is likely that Maymun was closely involved with the Khattabiya, perhaps helping to shape its beliefs and organization, and that he was responsible for encouraging its revolutionary aspect. The movement ultimately took its name from its most notable adherent, Ja'far al-Sadik's eldest son, Isma'il.

Isma'il was in line to succeed his father as imam, but is known to have been dispossessed.²⁰ The usual explanation is that this was for drunkenness, but it could have been because of Isma'il's association with the revolutionary Maymun al-Kadda. The extremists naturally refused to recognize any arbitrary alteration to the succession and continued to uphold Isma'il as the imam-designate.

19. The historicity of this figure seems now to be generally accepted, though the evidence remains fragmentary and inconclusive. W. Ivanow was anxious to deny any association between Maymun and Isma'ilism, dismissing him as a myth. (See Ivanow, Isma'ili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids (London, 1942) and The Alleged Founder of Isma'ilism (Bombay, 1946), but for the more usual view see Lewis, Origins, pp.54-57.)

20. Donaldson, pp.152-153.

At this point, a most unexpected event occurred; Isma'īl predeceased his father, in 762. The extremists were thrown into confusion, for Maymun al-Kaddah also appears to have died at this time.

When Ja'far himself died in 765, his second son Abd Allah was accepted as imam, but he died shortly afterwards, and the succession passed to a third son, Musa al-Kazim. He was recognized by the majority of the Shi'a as the seventh imam from 'Ali. Most of the Shi'a continued to adhere to Musa's descendants down to the twelfth imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Askari, who disappeared in 874. These are the so-called Twelver Shi'ites, or ithna 'ashariya, who to this day await the reappearance of their twelfth imam as the messiah or mahdi. Their differences from Sunnite orthodoxy have become fewer and fewer over the centuries, and Twelver Shi'ism is today the official religion of Iran.²¹

This accounts for the bulk of the Shi'a, the moderates and conservatives of the movement, whom we now must leave in order to trace the subsequent development of the extremist minority.

Having already recognized Isma'īl as their seventh imam, the extremists could not accept that the imamate would pass from brother to brother, and in time most of them appear to have rallied to Isma'īl's son, Muhammad. This new grouping, in which Maymun al-Kadda's son Abd Allah figured prominently, became known as the Isma'iliyya or Isma'ilis. Because they upheld Isma'īl as the seventh imam from

21. Lewis, Assassins, p.26.

‘Ali, they were also later referred to as the Seveners, to distinguish them from the Twelver Shi‘a.

Islam had already seen many various kinds of extremist movements, but the Isma‘ilis were to become perhaps the most enduring and significant of these. Since their ultimate objective could have been nothing less than the undermining and overthrow of the orthodox "establishment" in order to bring universal recognition to their imam, the Isma‘ilis suffered repeated persecution from the ‘Abbasid authorities, and were of necessity conspiratorial.

They did not stop at this political objective, however. Their innovations in belief were to be developed over the next few centuries by a succession of brilliant thinkers into a fully-articulated philosophical system, owing much to neo-Platonic influences and later attracting the serious consideration of the famous theologian and legist, Ghazali (d. 1111).

Much of the Isma‘ilis' appeal must have come from their spirit of close-knit secretive fellowship and their posture of defiance towards the authorities, but it has often been remarked that their faith, infused with warm personal emotionalism, answered a popular need which the dry legalistic formalism of the orthodox schoolmen failed to satisfy.²²

Their appeal was conveyed by a strikingly efficient propaganda organization. This consisted of a decentralized network of preaching missionaries (da‘is) who were each assigned to a specific

22. Lewis, Assassins, p.27.

province or jazira (literally, island). Both the overall preaching and the individual jazira were called da'wa, signifying the call of the imam for men to adopt his cause. As the name jazira suggests, each principal da'i was left entirely to himself, to build up a local organization of converts and assistants which would then send its newly-ordained preachers into further adjacent areas.²³

The ninth century seems to have been a period of intensive Isma'ili activity, and it is likely that some pockets of sympathy may have been created in traditionally Shi'ite areas of Irak, Syria, and Persia. The evidence is fragmentary, however, mainly because the movement worked in secret, from fear of 'Abbasid persecution. Not surprisingly, this has come to be styled the period of the "Hidden Imams", though it is thought that their chief hiding place was at one time Salamiya in Syria.²⁴

Confused genealogies make it difficult to trace a clear succession of imams. It has been suggested that there were in fact two recognizable lines which have been confused by later writers; one descended from Isma'il's son Muhammad, the actual or mustaqarr line, and the other descended from 'Abd Allah ibn Maymun al-Kadda, a mustawda or "trustee" line. This plurality is partly explicable by the practice of "spiritual adoption" among the Isma'ilis, whereby

23. M. Canard, "Da'wa", EI2, ii, pp.168-170; W. Ivanow, "The Organization of the Fatimid Propaganda," JBBRAS, XV (1939), pp.4-7, 10, 20.

24. W. Ivanow, Isma'ili Tradition concerning the Rise of the Fatimids, (London, 1942), especially the sources translated on pp.157-223.

a teacher-pupil relationship is more highly regarded than a physical father-son relationship.²⁵

More recent work, without denying Lewis's interpretation, has suggested that the line of imams was not clearly defined because most of the Isma'ilis were in fact awaiting Muhammad ibn Isma'il's return as the messiah or mahdi.²⁶ This is plausible in view of the strength of the mahdi concept observed earlier in the Shi'a, and would account for the lack of close attention to recording the line of imams.

The only open success to crown Isma'ili efforts in this period came in the Yemen. Elsewhere, their preaching failed to gain large-scale popular support. The Yemeni da'wa had its beginnings about 879, and seems to have been the work of two famous da'is of the time, 'Ali ibn Fadl and Ibn Hawshab. It was to remain a strongly Isma'ili area for many centuries, but it is mainly significant as the spring-board for an even more notable Isma'ili success in North Africa and Egypt. Before going on to trace this important development, something needs to be said of the notorious Karmatians.

25. Lewis, Origins, pp.44-75 presents this view in detail.

26. S.M. Stern, "Heterodox Ismā'īlism in the time of al-Mu'izz", BSOAS, XVII (1955), pp.10-23, and "Early Ismā'īli Missionaries in North West Persia and in Khurasan and Transoxiana", BSOAS, XXII (1960), pp.59-90. Apart from articles in EI2, I have not seen the work of W. Madelung, but some of his views on this point are represented in M. Canard, article "Fāṭimids", EI2, ii, pp.850ff. Until Stern's promised Early Ismā'īlism appears, his reinterpretation is conveniently outlined in a contribution to the 1959 Strasbourg Colloquy, published as "Ismā'īlis and Qarmatians" in L'Elaboration de l'Islam (Paris, 1961) pp.99-108.

The external history of this group, their unusual communal life at Bahrayn, their bloodthirsty invasions of Syria and Irak (902-3), their raids on Basra and Kufa (923-925) and their sack of Mecca in 928 when they absconded with the Black Stone from the Ka'aba, is well known.²⁷ As revolutionary extremism, this could scarcely be bettered, yet there has been much controversy about their relationship with Isma'ilism. What little is known of the main Isma'ili movement in this period points to a clandestine campaign of conversion rather than acts of premature violence which would only court repression. Entirely separate origins have been suggested for them, perhaps Hanafite, yet it is said that the Black Stone was returned to Mecca in 950 at the order of the then Fatimid imam.²⁸

Recent work has tended to confirm that the Karmatians were originally Isma'ilis. About 877-878 an Isma'ili da'i named Husayn al-Ahwazi converted one Hamdan Karmat in the Kufa region of Southern Irak. When the da'i passed on, Hamdan and his brother Abdan appear to have taken over leadership of the new da'wa at Kufa, making many converts among the peasants and Bedouin tribesmen.

27. For English readers, mainly from such elderly versions as the account of W. Muir, The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline, and Fall, (London, 1883; revised edition, Edinburgh, 1924), pp.558-562. Probably the best early treatment is that of M.J. de Goeje, Mémoire sur les Carmathes, (Leiden, 1888).

28. Lewis, Origins, pp.79, 84-86.

After public protests at their activities in 891, the movement shifted to a new centre at Bahrayn, indelibly branded with their leader's name.²⁹

Whether because of their isolation or Hamdan's charismatic leadership, or both, the Karmatians developed unusual and distinctive forms of belief and organization. It is to be assumed that they were still basically Isma'ili, but in 899 we are told that a clear break occurred between them and the central Isma'ili leadership.³⁰ Their relations thereafter range from cool recognition to outright war, so that it is perhaps advisable to regard them as lying outside the da'wa as a whole.

Much more significant for our purpose is to trace Isma'ili expansion from the successful Yemeni da'wa into North Africa. This followed the usual pattern of a one-man mission, the da'i in question being Abu Abdallah al-Shi'i, who left the Yemen in 892 in the company of a group of Kutama Berbers. Among their kinsfolk in North Africa he found ready if volatile converts. He appears to have successfully exploited their internal rivalries and their animosity towards the regime of the Aghlabids, who had ruled most of North Africa in

29. W. Madelung, article "Hamdan Karmat", EI2, iii, pp.123-4, and S.M. Stern, article "Abdān", EI2, i, pp.95-96. (See Map 1).

30. S.M. Stern, "Early Ismā'ili Missionaries in North West Persia and in Khurasan and Transoxiana", BSOAS, XXIII (1960) pp.69, 75. I have not seen Madelung's "Fatimiden und Bahrainqarmaten", Der Islam, XXXIV (1959).

the name of the 'Abbasid caliphs since 800.

In less than a decade, Abu Abdallah built up a strong military force among the Berbers, with which he proceeded to attempt the overthrow of Aghlabid rule. At this juncture (902) the then Isma'ili imam 'Ubayd Allah had to flee Syria in the face of the destructive Karmatian invasion. He tried to join Abu Abdallah, but was captured on his way by the Aghlabids. It took no fewer than seven years for Abu Abdallah and his Berber supporters to achieve the overthrow of the Aghlabids. The capital, Rakkada, was taken in March 909, and when 'Ubayd Allah was finally rescued and openly proclaimed as imam in January 910, the Isma'ilis found themselves in possession of a territorial state.³¹

'Ubayd Allah now emerges as a most capable leader, removing both Abu Abdallah al-Shi'i and his brother in 910 and going on to rule this nascent Isma'ili empire for over thirty years. He had already demonstrated his capabilities, however, long before he came to North Africa, and mention must now be made of this.

As an extension of the view that the line of imams after Muhammad ibn Isma'il was not clear owing to belief in Muhammad's imminent return as mahdi, it has been suggested that 'Ubayd Allah wrought a momentous change in Isma'ili outlook by declaring himself the first of a new series of visible imams.³² His new interpretation

31. S.M. Stern, article "Abū Abdallāh al-Shī'i", EI2, i, pp.103-104.

32. S.M. Stern, "The Early Ismā'īli Missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurasan and Transoxiana", BSOAS, XXIII (1960) pp.68-69.

of the imamate consisted in regarding Muhammad ibn Isma'īl as the first of a cycle of imams in satr or concealment. This might well be regarded as a solution to the problem of coping with followers who grow impatient that the mahdi seems never to be coming soon enough, for cycles of visible and invisible imams may alternate indefinitely before the final appearance of the mahdi. Stern dates this radical reinterpretation at about 899, and points to this as the cause of the Karmatians' severance from the main body of Isma'īlis. If they refused to accept 'Ubayd Allah's revision of the imamate, they would have persisted in awaiting Muhammad ibn Isma'īl's return as mahdi. They would regard 'Ubayd Allah and his successors not as imams but merely representatives of the awaited mahdi. Perhaps their violent campaigns in the early ninth century reflect their increasing sense of desperation and isolation.³³

Though the Karmatians had driven 'Ubayd Allah out of Syria, they did not as yet threaten his achievements in North Africa. He built a new capital in 920 on the Tunisian coast, named for his honorific title as precursor of the mahdi, Mahdiyya. He and his successor Abu'l-Kasim al-Ka'im gambled on a vigorous campaign of expansion into Morocco, Sicily, and adjacent territories, in search of a resource base adequate for their proposed challenge to the Abbasids.

33. S.M. Stern, "Early Ismā'īlī Missionaries in North West Persia and in Khurasan and Transoxiana", BSOAS, XXIII (1960) pp.68-70, 75; and W. Madelung, article "Hamdan Karmat", EI2, iii, pp.123-124.

Egypt had long been recognized as the ideal resource base, rich, easily governed, and strategically well placed for the leadership of Islam, but Isma'ili attempts at invasion in 913-915 and 919-921 were unsuccessful. Abu'l-Kasim al-Ka'im and his successor al-Mansur were hampered by difficulties in North Africa,³⁴ but under the Isma'ilis' fourth imam-caliph, al-Mu'izz, a carefully prepared invasion led by the brilliant Jawhar al-Rumi swept into Egypt in 969.

The Isma'ili conquest of Egypt and the creation of a prosperous empire under the Fatimid caliphs was a major development, not just for Isma'ilism, but for the history of Medieval Islam itself. The external history of the Fatimids is well known and bears no repetition in detail here,³⁵ but the significance of the conquest needs to be noticed, because it resurrected within Isma'ilism the old tension between moderates and extremists which originally split the movement away from the rest of the Shi'a.

The goal constantly professed by the Isma'ili preaching was of

34. Notably the Kharijite revolt, 943-947, for which see S.M. Stern, article "Abū Yazīd al-Nukkārī", EI2, i, pp.163-164.

35. A succinct up to date survey is the chapter by H.A.R. Gibb, "The Caliphate and the Arab States", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades (general editor K.M. Setton), I, The First Hundred Years (ed. M.W. Baldwin) Philadelphia, 1955, pp.81-99. See also M. Canard, article "Fāṭimids", EI2, ii, pp.850ff. S. Lane-Poole, A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages (London, 1901) and G. Wiet, L'Egypte Arabe (Paris, 1937) are much more detailed. For the Fatimids' anti-Abbasid political propaganda see Canard's article, "L'Impérialisme des Fatimides et leur propagande", Annales de l'Institut d'études orientales (Algiers), IV (1942-47), pp.156-162, 169-185, 192-3.

course the complete overthrow of the imposter caliphs of the 'Abbasids and their replacement by rightful Isma'ili imams. Now that a rich resource base had been secured, it seemed only a matter of time before this goal was realized. From their new capital al-Qahira (Cairo) the Fatimids extended their power into Syria, taking even the old 'Umayyad capital Damascus, and deep into Arabia where the holy cities of Medina and Mecca recognized Fatimid suzerainty.

But there the expansion finally stopped. 'Abbasid power was too formidable elsewhere. The Fatimids failed to fulfil their mandate.

This blunt truth caused much disillusionment among devoted Isma'ilis, who began to think their leaders were more concerned to preserve and enjoy what they had so far won than to risk all in fulfilling their divinely-appointed task. In the words of H.F. Hamdani, the da'wa which once aimed at the destruction of the 'Abbasid caliphate now defended the claims of the Fatimids, and the writings of its da'is betray a drift from revolutionary and eclectic principles to "a liberal yet conventional conservatism".³⁶ It is well-known that the Fatimids failed to win their Egyptian subjects en masse to Isma'ilism, despite the exertions of such outstanding religious leaders as the Kadi an-Numan (d. 974).³⁷

The thinly veiled discrepancy between traditional Isma'ili claims and the materialistic conservatism of the Fatimid caliphs

36. H.F. Hamdani, "Some Unknown Ismā'ili Authors and their works," JRAS (1933), p.366.

37. See M. Canard, article "Fāṭimids", EI2, ii, p.859.

made it likely that militant extremists would sooner or later rise up in protest. Possibly, the maintenance of missionary da'was in Irak and Persia, working in the face of Abbasid persecution, provided an adequate outlet for such enthusiasts down to the end of the reign of al-Aziz (975-996).

Under his successor, al-Hakim (996-1021), there appeared an extremist movement within Fatimid Isma'ilism which was to enjoy even greater longevity than the Fatimid state itself. Besides his notorious persecutions of Jews and Christians, and the excesses which earned him the sobriquet "the mad caliph", al-Hakim may genuinely have desired some sort of Isma'ili reviviscence under his leadership.³⁸

He seems to have regarded himself as something more than a mere imam, perhaps a semi-divine equivalent of one of the heavenly hierarchy, and he privately gave support to a radical movement led by al-Darazi which was prepared to support his claims. Typically, Hakim also supported a rival to al-Darazi within the movement, Hamza ibn 'Ali, who soon ousted his rival. The movement retained the memory of the unfortunate al-Darazi in its name, duruz, better known today as the Druzes.³⁹

This radical movement was most active from about 1017-18 but in 1021 its semi-divine patron disappeared, and so did its leader Hamza, shortly afterwards. The sect in Egypt did not survive this

38. See M. Canard, article "al-Hākīm bi-Amr Allāh", EI2, iii, pp.78-82. In 1005 al-Hakim founded a dar al-ʿilm to promote Isma'ili teachings in Cairo.

39. See M.G.S. Hodgson, article "Durūz", EI2, ii, pp.631-634.

double bereavement, and soon faded out. Converts had been made in Syria, however, and this smaller group maintained that Hakim was not dead but only concealed. The Druzes remain to this day a small eclectic community in the Lebanon, still awaiting Hakim's return as their mahdi.

The episode illustrates that even in its prime Fatimid Isma'ilism was open to tension between the easy-going and the earnestly devout, which, if given sufficient provocation, might issue in serious schism.

The decline of the Fatimid caliphate seems to lead directly to such a situation at the end of the eleventh century. Mustansir's long reign (1036-1094) saw in its early stages the apogee of Fatimid power and influence, but in the middle of the reign, exceptionally low flood levels of the Nile crippled food production and a disastrous famine (1066-1073) seriously undermined the economic prosperity fostered by earlier caliphs.⁴⁰ Social distress contributed to popular risings in the provinces and serious faction struggles among mercenaries in the army. In desperation, Mustansir called on one of his loyal provincial armies to come and restore order in Egypt. This was the army of the governor of Acre, Badr al-Jamali, who from his arrival in 1074 steadily increased his personal control until the caliph was little more than the helpless figurehead of a military dictatorship.

40. For details of the extreme social distress and dislocation caused by the famine, see Lane-Poole, A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages, (London, 1901) pp.146-150.

Much the same thing had happened to the 'Abbasid caliphs in the mid-tenth century when they were "adopted" by the Iranian dynasty known as the Buyids or Buwayhids. The Buyids had shown a casual indifference in matters religious, but in 1055 they were replaced at Baghdad by the Saljuk Turks, a recently-converted central Asian dynasty. Unlike the Buyids, the Saljuks were zealous for their faith and chose to commit their powerful war machine to the advocacy of Sunnite orthodoxy. By the end of the century, the Saljuks had spread themselves widely in the Muslim world, even wresting most of Anatolia from the Byzantine empire.

Badr al-Jamali had no such ambitions; he was to the Fatimids what the Buyids had been to the 'Abbasids, and his military dictatorship lost relevance even to the ideals of conservative Isma'ilism. Yet the Saljuk invasions of Persia, Irak, and Northern Syria forcibly reminded the Isma'ilis that their own proposed revolution had come to a dead halt while Sunnite orthodoxy had achieved a dramatic renewal of power. As the Fatimids became shackled to Badr al-Jamali's military regime, the zealous da'is outside Egypt became increasingly concerned at the Saljuk-Sunnite revival.

Circumstances seemed ripe for yet another split within Isma'ilism, and the schism was not long in coming after Badr al-Jamali's death in 1094. The occasion did not come from the Isma'ilis themselves, however.^{40a}

Badr was succeeded by his son al-Afdal, who easily maintained his father's firm and autocratic control over Egypt. Then, only a few

40a. See H.A.R. Gibb, "The Caliphate and the Arab States", in K.M. Setton (ed.), The Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, pp.95-96.

months after Badr, the aged imam-caliph Mustansir also died. Al-Afdal seized this opportunity to extend his control into the religious life of his realm, and married his daughter to Mustansir's younger son Musta^cli. He then appointed this pliant youth to be the new caliph.

To do this al-Afdal had to ignore Mustansir's nass or designation of succession on his eldest son Nizar. For al-Afdal's purposes, Musta^cli was far preferable to Nizar, who already had a strong following. Predictably, his action broke the Isma^cili community asunder. Nizar staged a futile revolt at Alexandria but it was crushed and he probably died in one of al-Afdal's prisons. However, while al-Afdal's military power ensured that Egypt accepted Musta^cli as caliph, one of the outlying missionary da^cwas refused to recognize Musta^cli, and upheld Nizar as the rightful imam.

This was by far the most active, the "Persian" da^cwa⁴¹ under the da^ci Hasan-i Sabbah. The "Persian" Isma^cilis were acutely concerned at the power of the Saljuk advocacy of Sunnite Islam, and promptly severed all connexion with the Fatimids to carry on their lonely struggle against the Saljuks as an entirely autonomous sect. From their allegiance to Nizar, they were properly termed the Nizari Isma^ciliyya. These are the famous "Persian Assassins".

Before looking more closely at Hasan-i Sabbah and the "Persian" Isma^cilis, a postscript might be added to round off the fate of the

41. This convenient but not completely accurate designation is intended to cover Isma^cili activity in Irak and Transoxiana as well as in Persia itself.

Musta'lian form of Isma'ilism, because this figures briefly in the story of the Syrian Nizaris.

The Nizaris, calling themselves proudly "the new preaching", derisively labelled the Musta'lians "the old preaching", and relations between the two appear to have been anything but cordial. Musta'li's successor, al-'Amir, was in fact assassinated by the Nizaris in 1130. This caused a serious schism amongst the Isma'ilis of the Yemen. What was left of the spiritual vitality of the Fatimid da'wa seems to have been preserved there.⁴²

Al-'Amir's infant son, Tayyib, did not long survive his father, and only after a bitter confused struggle did the regent declare himself to be the new caliph, al-Hafiz. A large section of the Yemeni Isma'ilis refused to recognize al-Hafiz and from their adherence to Tayyib, presumed not dead but only hidden, they became known as the Tayyibi Isma'iliyya.

While the remnants of Fatimid Isma'ilism adhered to the Hafizi caliphs down to the Sunnite reconquest of Egypt and the death of their last caliph in 1171, the Tayyibis split into further opposed factions, one of which settled in India. These Indian Isma'ilis are called Bohras, and from their rich libraries, only just being opened

42. On what follows, see the detailed discussion in S.M. Stern, "The Succession to the Fāṭimid Imām al-'Amir, the claims of the later Fatimids to the Imamate, and the Rise of Tayyibi Ismā'ilism," Oriens, IV (1951), pp.193-255.

to non-Isma^cilis, have come many early texts which in this century have revolutionized Isma^cili studies and given us a much better understanding of the origins and development of the movement.

CHAPTER II

HASAN-I SABBAAH AND NIZARI ISMA'ILISM

Though the date of Hasan-i Sabbah's birth is not known, he was born in Kumm, an old Shi'ite settlement in western Persia, and his father was a Twelver Shi'ite.¹ Hasan spent his youth at Rayy, where he was influenced by the preaching of an Isma'ili da'i named Amira Dharrab. Hasan began to read Isma'ili treatises, but was suddenly stricken by a serious illness. He is said to have been terrified of dying without knowing what truth there was in their teaching, so when he recovered he at once sought out someone who

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1. M.G.S. Hodgson, The Order of Assassins; the Struggle of the Early Nizârî Ismâ'ilîs against the Islamic World, (The Hague, 1955), p.43, hereafter cited as Hodgson. The fundamental sources for Hasan and the "Persian" Nizaris are the thirteenth century historians, Ata-Malik Juvayni and Rashid al-Din Fadl-Allah. Juvayni accompanied the Mongol army which destroyed Alamut in 1256 and was given access to the library before it was burned. There he took copious notes from whatever seemed important, especially from a life of Hasan-i Sabbah entitled the Sargudhasht-i Sayyid-na. He later included an extended account of Hasan and the Nizaris in his history of the Mongol conquest. My references are to the second volume of J.A. Boyle's translation, The History of the World Conqueror, (Manchester, 1958). Rashid al-Din's account is remarkably similar but much more detailed in certain passages. It has been suggested (H. Bowen, "The sar-gudhasht-i sayyidna, the 'Tale of the Three School-Fellows' and the wasaya of the Nizam al-Mulk," JRAS, (1931), p.771.) that Juvayni's is a redaction of his original notes and that Rashid used these original notes more fully at a later date. It is possible, of course, that Rashid had access to other sources now lost. (See S.M. Stern, "The Early Ismâ'ili Missionaries in North-West Persia and in Khurasan and Transoxiana", BSOAS, XXII (1960) p.85 n 2). There is no complete European translation of Rashid; I have relied on Hodgson, who makes very full use of the British Museum MS. Other brief extracts from Rashid are also translated in Lewis, Assassins, pp.38-39.

who could expound their doctrine to him more fully.²

One Abu Najim Sarraj finally converted Hasan to Isma'ilism, and he took the oath of allegiance from al-Mu'min, the assistant to the head of the west Persian da'wa. Little is known of Hasan as a youthful initiate, but in 1072 the head of the da'wa, Abd al-Malik ibn 'Attash, visited Rayy and so approved of Hasan's progress that he promoted him to an assistantship and (perhaps at a later date) commissioned him to go to the imam at Cairo as his personal representative.³

Hasan left Isfahan about 1076, travelling north west to Mayyafariqin, where he ran foul of the local kadi for his preaching activities. He next appeared in Damascus, where news of disturbances on the overland route made him decide to continue his journey by sea. He arrived at Cairo on 30 August, 1078.⁴

Few details survive of his three year stay in Egypt.⁵ It seems that he did not even meet the imam-caliph Mustansir, and there is nothing to support Juvayni's story that he had to leave because

2. Hodgson, pp.44-45. Hodgson's chapter, "The Ismā'īlī State" in The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume V; The Saljuq and Mongol Periods, (ed.) J.A. Boyle, (Cambridge, 1968) pp.422-482, sharpens some of the detail and interpretation of his 1955 monograph.

3. Hodgson, p.45. See also B. Lewis, article "Ibn 'Attash", EI2, iii, p.725. Rayy is now Tehran, the modern capital of Iran.

4. Hodgson, p.46. (See Maps 1 and 2).

5. Hodgson, "Ḥaṣan-i Šabbāḥ", EI2, iii, p.253, which corrects the shorter period given in Order, p.47.

his preaching on behalf of Nizar incurred the wrath of Badr al-Jamali.⁶ We do not even know if he had any dealings with Nizar or his following, but Mustansir's nass or designation of Nizar as his successor would have been public knowledge. Whatever the reason, Hasan finally left Egypt and was back in Isfahan in June, 1081.⁷

The next nine years were devoted to missionary travels in Persia on behalf of the da'wa, mostly near his home territory in the north-west, though some sources take him as far afield as Yazd and Kerman in central and southern Persia. His standing in the da'wa rose steadily in these years, for he is soon depicted as having a large number of da'is under his command.⁸ It is possible that a large scale campaign of some sort against the Saljuks was already being planned, because Hasan was reputedly searching for suitable permanent headquarters for the movement.⁹

To continue as before with clandestine cells in towns and cities was not secure enough, for these were at all times vulnerable to discovery and extermination by Sunnites, if not by the Saljuk authorities. Far preferable would be to follow the example of numerous brigand chieftains of the time and seek a self-contained defensible site in a remote area difficult of access for regular

6. Juvayni/Boyle, pp.668-669.

7. Juvayni/Boyle, p.669.

8. Juvayni/Boyle, p.669.

9. Hodgson, p.47.

troops. Such an ideal was readily attainable in the traditionally Shi'ite mountainous district of Daylaman, just north of Hasan's home territory. The warlike and independent villagers of this region had scant love for either Sunnite or Saljuk, and the area abounded in strongly fortified hill-top settlements.¹⁰

Hasan concentrated his attention on one of the finest of these fortified sites, in the heart of the Elburz mountains. This was the rock of Alamut, a lofty steep-sided ridge rising several hundred feet above the valley which it dominates. Alamut already had strategic importance as the key to Daylaman province; it was a control point on the shortest road between Kazvin and the shores of the Caspian Sea.¹¹

Alamut was obtained by stratagem. From Kazvin, Hasan sent the da'i Husayn to assess the possibilities for seizure and to convert the villagers who were living atop Alamut. Husayn even tried to convert the governor who was holding the place in the name of the supreme Saljuk Sultan, Malik-Shah. This governor pretended to be

10. Hodgson, p.74; W. Ivanow, "Alamut", Geographical Journal LXXVII (1931) p.43.

11. Hodgson, pp.73-74; Lewis, Assassins, p.43; L. Lockhart and M.G.S. Hodgson, "Alamūt", EI2, i, p.353. See also: the article by Ivanow cited above; L. Lockhart, "Hasan-i Sabbah and the Assassins", BSOAS, V (1928-30), pp.689-696; Freya Stark, "The Assassins' Valley and the Salambar Pass", Geographical Journal, LXXVII (1931) pp.48-60, and The Valleys of the Assassins, (London, 1934); P. Willey, The Castles of the Assassins, (London, 1963), especially pp.214-225.

converted, then sent Husayn and his followers down to the valley on some pretext, shutting the gates against their return. For whatever unknown reason, he later readmitted them, and found to his despair no way of removing them again.¹²

Hasan quietly sent small groups of his men up to Alamut and established himself nearby to direct the conversion of neighbouring villages. He finally entered Alamut in disguise on 4 September 1090, and remained hidden there until his following was so strong that the governor had no alternative but to relinquish the place.¹³

Hasan-i Sabbah lived at Alamut from 1090 until his death in 1124. His rule shows him to be a gifted leader, characterized by extreme asceticism and piety. What Hodgson calls "an intense and severe logic" extended even to the execution of his own sons for misdemeanours.¹⁴ Hasan's immediate tasks at Alamut appear to have been the strengthening of the walls, amassing of provisions, and digging of irrigation channels to improve both water supply to the castle and irrigation for the farms in the valley.¹⁵

In seizing Alamut, Hasan was not making a bid to take over the da^cwa; he acted merely as the agent of the chief da^ci, Abd al-Malik ibn ^cAttash, and his allegiance was still directed to the Fatimid

12. Juvayni/Boyle, pp.669-670.

13. Rashid al-Din, translated extract in Hodgson, p.49.

14. Hodgson, p.51.

15. Hodgson, p.50.

caliph Mustansir as imam and supreme head of the whole Isma'ili movement. Nonetheless, the acquisition of Alamut marked Hasan as a capable and far-sighted da'i. It is not at all surprising that he became head of the "Persian" da'wa on the death of Abd al-Malik ibn 'Attash.¹⁶

With Alamut as their citadel, the "Persian" Isma'ili movement began to redouble its activities. Juvayni tells us that Hasan "dispatched da'is in all directions and devoted the whole of his time to spreading his propaganda and perverting the short-sighted".¹⁷ At the same time, Hasan made every attempt to secure further fortified places, if not by persuasion or assault, then by building them; "he took such castles as he could and wherever he found a suitable rock he built a castle on it".¹⁸ Sanamkuh, west of Kazvin, was one of these. It was taken soon after Alamut, in 1091.¹⁹

For lack of evidence, it is difficult to be precise about the extent of the Isma'ili preaching network prior to the taking of

16. Lewis, Assassins, p.49; the date is not known.

17. Juvayni/Boyle, p.671.

18. Juvayni/Boyle, pp.673-674. W. Ivanow, "Alamut", Geographical Journal (1931), p.43, points out that the translation "castle" is perhaps misleading for this area. Many of Hasan's "castles" would have been, not massive structures in the medieval European sense, as Alamut undoubtedly became, but simply fortified villages, or refuge places used only in times of danger and ordinarily left empty.

19. Hodgson, p.74.

Alamut, but it is possible that the groundwork for Isma'ili expansion after 1090 had already been laid to some extent. Hasan's agents seem to have been most active in the districts surrounding Alamut, in Rudbar and Daylaman. These were areas of long-standing Shi'ite influence, which had produced, among others, the Shi'ite dynasty of the Buyids.²⁰

But attention was given to other areas as well, and striking success was had in one of these.

Juvayin tells us that in 484 / 1091-2 Hasan sent the da'i Husayn of Qa'in to his home territory of Kuhistan, there to conduct propaganda.²¹ Husayn seems to have stumbled upon if not actually fomented something of a popular rising, for we soon find town after town in this mountainous south-eastern province rising in revolt against the unpopular Saljuk governor and declaring for the Isma'ili cause.²² Hodgson suggests that where there were no previous localized Isma'ili roots, such mass accretions may have helped centralize the "Persian" da'wa around Hasan at Alamut; a subtle shift away from the traditional Isma'ili pattern of autonomous localized da'was.²³ Unlike previous da'is, independent while owing general allegiance to the imam as head of the whole da'wa, Hasan's da'is appear to have

20. Hodgson, p.74.

21. Juvayni/Boyle, p.674.

22. Lewis, Assassins, p.45. Hodgson, p.74.

23. Hodgson, p.71.

displayed unusually close allegiance to their Persian centre at Alamut. Perhaps this is a reflection of the remoteness of Cairo as much as of any unsettled feelings about the Fatimid caliph's subjection to Badr al-Jamali's military regime in Egypt.

Isma^cili successes around Alamut and in Kuhistan caused no little anxiety among the Saljuk amirs at the court of the Sultan Malikshah. Even while Hasan was directing the seizure of Alamut, we are told that he had to avoid his home town, Rayy, because the Sultan's able chief minister Nizam al-Mulk had charged its governor, Bu-Muslim Razi, to lay hands on Hasan as soon as he could.²⁴

As the new vigour of the Persian da^cwa under Hasan became more apparent, the anxiety of the Saljuk authorities showed itself in sterner measures. The most notable example which can be placed in the period before 1092 is the incident at Sawa.²⁵ Eighteen Isma^cilis were arrested there for conducting festival prayers in competition with the Sunnites. They were later released, but it seems that they forthwith murdered the muezzin of the town. Perhaps they had told him too much of their plans while trying to convert him. Nizam al-Mulk at once sent strict orders for the execution of the culprit, one Tahir, a carpenter.²⁶

24. Juvayni/Boyle, p.669.

25. Hodgson, p.48. Ibn al-Athir gives the date 494 /1100-1101 yet says it took place in Malikshah's reign (d. 1092). Thus his date may be a simple copyist's error of 494 for 484 /1091.

26. Lewis, Assassins, p.46.

It was obvious, however, that the efforts of village policemen to curb Isma'ili expansion were at best unco-ordinated, at worst clumsy and ineffectual. Military action was needed. This came in 1092, when Malikshah sent two armies, one into Daylaman and the other into Kuhistan. Surprisingly, both expeditions were utter failures. The army against Alamut commenced its siege in Jumada I (June-July) 1092. Hasan's garrison was at the time depleted, probably by the intensive propaganda campaigns elsewhere, but his da'is were able to rally a useful force of Isma'ilis from the neighbouring districts, and in a surprise night attack in Sha'ban (September-October) 1092, the Saljuk army under Arslantash was routed.²⁷

Perhaps it was this brilliant success which emboldened Hasan to attempt what seems to be his first essay in the technique later to characterize his movement. An Isma'ili named Bu Tahir Arrani assassinated Nizam al-Mulk on Friday, 16 October 1092, as he was being carried on a litter through the sultan's camp at Shahna, in Nihavand.²⁸

Nizam al-Mulk's death was followed only a few weeks later by

27. Juvayni/Boyle, p.675.

28. Juvayni/Boyle, p.676; Rashid al-Din, extract translated in Lewis, Assassins, p.47. See also M. Th. Houtsma, "The Death of Nizâm al-Mulk and its Consequences", Journal of Indian History, series 3, II (1924), pp.147-160.

that of the supreme Saljuk sultan Malikshah, in November, 1092. The news of the Sultan's death halted all activity against the Isma'ilis; the army besieging the Kuhistan Isma'ilis at Dara withdrew and dispersed.

The death of Sultan and minister spelt the end of Saljuk unity. The empire they had both striven to preserve rapidly disintegrated into a patchwork of princedoms and virtually autonomous provinces and districts. The Isma'ilis had been given a breathing space, and no doubt anticipated many opportunities for expansion while the Saljuk princes and governors struggled for power amongst themselves.

Accordingly, in or about 1093, two more areas of expansion were added to Rudbar and Kuhistan, namely the eastern end of the Elburz range and the mountainous district between Fars and Khuzistan far to the south.²⁹

Though open success seemed to come easily in such remote hilly districts, often traditionally Shi'ite anyway, Isma'ili da'is were still active in the lowland areas of Sunnite and Saljuk predominance.

The earliest Isma'ili acquisition in an area of Saljuk dominance was the castle of Takrit in Irak, but this was small and exposed and does not appear to have troubled the Saljuks unduly.³⁰

29. Hodgson, p.76; Lewis, Assassins, p.45.

30. Ibn al-Athir, cited in Hodgson, p.95.

Yet when the Saljuks would not bestir themselves, the zealots among the Sunnite citizenry took matters into their own hands. The Sunnite response tended towards occasional massacres of Isma'ilis, indicative of their mingled rage and terror. At Isfahan, in 1093, there was a massacre of Isma'ilis in the city.³¹ In the same year, the citizens of Rayy attacked an Isma'ili fort near Alamut, being beaten off only with difficulty.³² But apart from these isolated outbursts, the Isma'ilis were relatively free from serious opposition after 1092.

Then, in the midst of rising fortunes, came the shattering news from Egypt of Nizar's deposition after Mustansir's death and Musta'li's installation as the imam-caliph. As we have already observed, the "Persian" Isma'ilis chose not to recognize Musta'li, upholding Mustansir's nass, and proclaimed their allegiance to Nizar. All connexion with the Fatimid da'wa was severed. This action made the Nizaris, as they now should be called, an autonomous movement, but they had already been independent of Cairo in fact if not in theory for some time. It is noteworthy, for example, that the leadership of the da'wa before Hasan's time had been Persian, not sent from Egypt as might have been expected.

This de facto autonomy of the Persian da'wa is perhaps reflected

31. Hodgson, pp.77, 85.

32. This was Taliqan. Rashid al-Din, year 486 / 1093, cited in Hodgson, p.78.

in another important respect. It is striking that Nizar's death without successor went without official recognition, explanation or reassurance from Alamut, yet Nizari activity in Persia shows no lapse of vigour. How Hasan solved the problem of the Nizari imamate is still not clear. At no time did he ever claim to be more than the hujja or "proof" of the imam. The commonest explanation, that a posthumous son of Nizar by a concubine was brought to Alamut where the line was preserved in secret, is late and unreliable.³³ The silence of our fundamental sources, Juvayni and Rashid al-Din, is surely significant; Hasan made no claim to possess the imam.

If, as seems likely, there was no imam at Alamut, there may have been an alternative explanation which emphasised Hasan's role as hujja. Such an explanation could easily be misconstrued by outsiders into a belief that the imam was actually hidden at Alamut.³⁴ The imam Mustansir would already have been little more than an abstraction to ordinary initiates in Persia, who gave practical obedience not to the imam himself but to his representative, Hasan. Nizar's death would therefore have made little difference to the realities of life in the Persian da'wa.

Differences did appear, however, and it is now necessary to digress somewhat in order to understand the changes Hasan-i Sabbah made in traditional Isma'ili beliefs and organization. These were

33. Hodgson, p.66

34. Hodgson, pp.67-69.

not sweeping, but they were nonetheless effective, and are important for our understanding of the sources of Nizari cohesion through their later trials and exploits in Syria.³⁵

Though orthodox Sunnites accused them of apostasy, it would be wrong for us to regard the Isma^cilis as non-Muslim simply because they were not orthodox. Sunnite and Isma^cili alike adhered to certain basic elements of Islam. This is most evident in their mutual acceptance of the shahada or profession of belief in God's oneness and the mission of His Prophet, Muhammad. Both regarded the Kur'an as divinely-inspired and an indispensable guide to the faithful, though their use of the text differed markedly. Close similarities exist even in the obligations of faith which are held to extend beyond the shahada. No Sunnite would quibble with this extract from an Isma^cili creed; "I believe that prayer, and alms, and fasting, and pilgrimage, and holy warfare, and justice and benefice, and the giving to a relative are obligatory on the believers."³⁶

35. What follows is not intended to be a complete summary of Isma^cili doctrine. My purpose is simply to indicate those features of belief which seem most distinctively to characterize the movement. My understanding has in general been derived from Lewis and Hodgson, but in especial from Nasseh Ahmad Mirza's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, "The Syrian Isma^cilis at the Time of the Crusades", (Durham, 1963). (Hereafter cited as Mirza). Dr Mirza tells me he is himself an Isma^cili, from Salamiya, one-time Syrian residence of the so-called "Hidden Imams" of the ninth century. (letter, 27 March, 1969.)

36. E.E. Salisbury, "Translation of two unpublished Arabic documents relating to the doctrines of the Isma^cilis and other Batinian sects", JAOS, II (1851), p.309; cited hereafter as Salisbury. Hodgson, p.332, describes these two fragments as "systematic expositions of doctrine."

In addition to ritual cleansing, the Isma'ilis added a further obligation which is distinctively theirs, namely devotion to the imam.³⁷

Perhaps it was because they held so much in common that the orthodox regarded the bid'a or innovation of the Isma'ilis as doubly pernicious. Though Ghazali was finally moved to declare the Batiniyya or esoteric sects apostate and worthy of death while the rest of the Shi'a was merely in error and astray, it should not be forgotten that the Isma'ilis could take the same deadly legalistic view of Sunnites who refused to join them after hearing their message.³⁸

The doctrine of the imamate is probably the fundamental point of difference between the orthodox and the Isma'ilis. The very essence of the Sunnite position is that the umma can rule itself and attain truth by the agreement (ijma') of its learned men on the meaning of the Kur'an and traditions. The Isma'ilis, however, could not believe that God would leave the faithful without an infallible leader, and extended the orthodox doctrine of the succession of prophets into a great cyclical system which assumes virtually continuous God-sent guidance.

37. S.M. Stern, "Abū'l-Qāsim al-Bustī and his Refutation of Ismā'īlism", JRAS (1961), p.24, quoting from a standard Isma'ili law book, the Da'ā'im al-Islam of the Kadi an-Numan.

38. Hodgson, pp.124-133. There is a useful English translation of Ghazali's fatwa (or decision on the theoretical application of the law) though not his more detailed Repudiation concerning the Batiniyya in A. Jeffery, Reader in Islam (The Hague, 1962), pp.254ff., taken from I. Goldziher's Streitschrift des Gazali gegen die Batinijja-Sekte (Leiden, 1916), extract 24.

The basic pattern was set by the succession of great prophets (natiq), Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Each natiq (revealer or speaker of true doctrine) was believed to have a helper, variously termed wasi (executor) or asas (foundation), who was entrusted by the natiq with a deeper inner meaning of the divine revelation to man. 'Ali, of course, was regarded as Muhammad's asas.³⁹ This 'ilm (science or interpretation of religion) was handed on to a succession of imams by a personal but divinely predestined designation, or nass. Between each natiq, any number of cycles of imams may occur, the imams alone possessing ta'lim (authoritative teaching), for which the faithful owe them unhesitating obedience in all things.⁴⁰

This ta'lim which made the imam so vital to the Isma'ili system rested chiefly on the doctrine which gave them one of their popular names; the belief in a batin or hidden inner meaning of scripture (hence batini or batiniyya). Aside from its apparent literal meaning, every detail in the Ku'ran was awarded a symbolic meaning. For example, "fasting is the abstaining from disclosure of the verities".⁴¹ Even the stages in the pilgrimage at Mecca were given symbolic significance. Number and letter symbolism was

39. S. Guyard, "Fragments relatifs à la doctrine des Ismaéliens", Notices et Extraits, XII (1874), p.189.

40. Hodgson, pp.52-53.

41. Salisbury, p.318.

frequently used; the cycles of imams always run in sevens, for instance. This process of isolating the batin meaning from the literal (zahir) was called ta'wil, the esoteric interpretation possessed only by the asas and his succeeding imams.⁴²

Another leading feature of Isma'ili belief was the system of the universal divine order, an attempt to identify the basic principles of the cosmos and the ranks of the heavenly hierarchy. With God as originator, the first principle of the universe was the Universal Intellect (al 'aql al-kull), from which emanated the Universal Soul (al-nafs al-kull). These were the First and Second Cosmic principles, whose interaction brought about the Creation.⁴³

Ranked below these two were the rest of the heavenly hierarchy. Finding earthly equivalents for each supposed rank was one of the chief preoccupations of Isma'ili philosophy, and was called the hudud 'alam al-din, or principles of religious obligation.⁴⁴ Thus the natiq would be the earthly counterpart of the First Cosmic Principle, and the asas of the Second Principle, and so on. This equivalence was thought to demonstrate the predestination of the succession of natiqs and imams.

These leading features of Isma'ili belief were inherited by

42. M.G.S. Hodgson, article "Bāṭiniyya", EI2, i, pp.1098-1099. See also Salisbury, p.280, where non-Isma'ilis are repeatedly designated as "the People of the Outward Sense".

43. Mirza, pp.137, 151-152. Salisbury, pp.299-303.

44. W. Ivanow, "The Organization of the Fatimid Propaganda", JBBRAS, XV (1939), p.8.

the Nizaris. Though it must be assumed that no sweeping changes were made in actual doctrine, certain changes in emphasis created what was virtually a new belief. The responsibility for this is usually given to Hasan-i Sabbah himself, though he may have inherited some ideas from his predecessor as head of the "Persian" da^cwa, 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Attash.⁴⁵

We are fortunate to possess what purports to be a summary of a treatise by Hasan himself on the subject of ta^clim, preserved in ash-Shahrastāni (d. 1153).⁴⁶ Hasan's subtly-reasoned critique, paradoxical and elusive (perhaps because of the conciseness of the summary), goes far beyond any previous Isma^cili works on the subject. All that he does is to develop four propositions which seem to destroy the usual Sunnite and Shi^cite arguments on the need for an authoritative guide; and to resolve the negation in such a way that the Nizari imam appears to be the only possible guide for Islam. This places immense importance on Hasan's own role as hujja or "proof" of the imam.

One of the neat demonstrations which Hasan advances to support his critique is the old saying that unity testifies to truth while multiplicity indicates error. Certainly, one of the leading features of the Nizaris was their extraordinary unity. Shahrastāni notes that

45. Hodgson, pp.52, 60.

46. His al-Milal wa-u-nihal; translated as Appendix II, Hodgson pp.325-328. See also the older translation in the Introduction to Salisbury, pp.263-272.

Hasan "prevented ordinary persons from delving into knowledge, and likewise the elite from investigating former books".⁴⁷

This suggests that Hasan may have discouraged traditional speculation on the batin and imposed instead a strictly authoritarian conformity. It is known, for example, that the usual allurements of the Muslim paradise, conveyed through richly imaginative portrayals of a many-mansioned heaven replete with precious stones, good food, and dark eyed female companions, were gradually dried up as the Nizari neophyte progressed through the rigorous degrees of initiation, until he was left with a stark and simple quest for proximity to the imam's understanding.⁴⁸ This was, it seems, heaven enough for the truly devout.

It is obvious that the Nizaris' unusual degree of unity and cohesion, their "group spirit", had a spiritual or doctrinal source, but this was strongly reinforced by the traditional Isma^cili organization of the sect, to which we now must turn.

47. Hodgson, p.427.

48. S. Guyard, "Fragments relatifs à la doctrine des Ismaéliques", Notices et Extraits, XXII (1874), pp.399-402. Compare the earlier translation by M. Rousseau in Annales des Voyages, 1re série, XVIII (1812), pp.236-237, which Guyard frequently corrects. On the degrees of initiation, originally seven but apparently later increased to nine, see Guyard, "Un grand maître des Assassins", JA, 7e série, IX (1877), pp.332-3, but cf. Ivanow, "The Organization of the Fatimid Propaganda", JBBRAS, XV (1939), p.11, n.3.

At first sight, the evidence for Isma'ili organization seems wonderfully abundant; few Isma'ili writers fail to discuss the hudud 'alam al-din. However, as we have seen, the hudud is not a straightforward listing of ranks, but a form of abstract theory seeking to establish ideal correspondences between the heavenly hierarchy and its earthly counterpart. It is extraordinarily difficult to decide whether the earthly ranks offered in hudud treatises are actual or ideal.⁴⁹ Besides, there was more than one system of earthly gradation. Aside from the hierarchy of da'is, there were recognized degrees of initiation and also a system of stages by which the convictions of would-be converts were broken down and replaced by Isma'ili dogma.⁵⁰

Faced with this potential degree of confusion, our apparent abundance of evidence shrinks almost to nothing. More reliable are incidental references in non-hudud fragments such as the Mujizatu'l-Kafiya of Sayyid-na Ahmad an-Naysaburi.⁵¹ This is believed to have been written in the early eleventh century and is a short treatise on the qualities and duties of the ideal da'i. It is an ideal picture, and life in the da'wa in Fatimid times may perhaps have been less exacting than this treatise suggests, but it at least offers

49. W. Ivanow, "The Organization of the Fatimid Propaganda", JBBRAS, XV (1939), p.5; hereafter cited as Ivanow.

50. Hodgson, p.18 n.17.

51. Extract translated in Ivanow, pp.18-35.

sufficient insight into the organization of the da'wa to enable a tentative outline of the system of ranks.

The imam of course crowns the earthly hierarchy. Below him, the term da'i is applied to all commissioned preachers, but within this large category various titles indicated seniority. The hujja or "proof" of the imam was highest of all the da'is, while the bab or "gate" to the imam probably came next. This name would be used of chief da'is in outlying da'was as well. Below the senior da'is, who alone could receive the oaths of those who had passed all the degrees of initiation, were the licensed preachers. There are the ma'dhuns. Two other names are closely related to them; the mukasir (persuaders) whose task was to break down neophytes' previous convictions, and the mu'min whose functions are not known. These constituted the active preaching da'is of the da'wa. Of the laity, ordinary initiates were called mustajib, while would-be converts were called muhajir.⁵²

It must be assumed, for want of specific evidence, that this basic gradation of ranks was in use in the Persian da'wa before 1094 and that the Nizaris made no radical alterations to the system they inherited. Indeed, there is reason to believe that a system of ranks would be more strongly emphasised by Hasan, just as the degrees of initiation were apparently made more rigorous.⁵³ It is unlikely

52. Naysaburi, in Ivanow, pp.9-11, 25, 26-28, 30-31.

53. Hodgson, p.60.

that the Nizaris would have abandoned such ready-made means of securing what they now so desperately needed; internal discipline. Even under the Fatimids, reduction of rank was a severe form of punishment, which the ~~K~~adi an-Numan equates with excommunication and flaying alive.⁵⁴ That the Nizaris retained the basic Fatimid structure of ranks is confirmed by the appearance of Fatimid names in the Nizari texts known as the Guyard fragments.⁵⁵

The first fragment uses the terms hujja and bab in the traditional Fatimid sense, and offers a third equivalent senior rank, namely, naqib. The second fragment offers a list of ranks, namely asas, imam, hujja, naqib, and da'i.⁵⁶ Finally, another synonym for da'i is offered, namely janah or wing, which also occurs in the refutation of Abu'l-Qasim al-Busti.⁵⁷ Juvayni offers yet another synonym for da'i when speaking of Husayn, the founder of the Kuhistan da'wa; this is the term na'ib or deputy, which appears nowhere in Nizari or Fatimid sources relating to ranks.⁵⁸

The most striking organizational innovation of the Nizaris was of course that of the notorious fida'is who actually performed the

54. Ivanow, translated extract from the Kitabu'l-Himma, p.17; see also p.31, for similar point in Naysaburi.

55. Translated S. Guyard, "Fragments relatifs á la doctrine des Ismaélites", Notices et Extraits, XXII (1874) pp.275-428.

56. Guyard, op.cit., pp.188, 275, 282, 314-315.

57. S.M. Stern, "Abū'l-Qāsim al-Bustī's Refutation of Ismā'īlism", JRAS (1961) p.23.

58. Juvayni/Boyle, p.674.

assassination assignments. Both the organizational significance of this group and its reflection of the policies and political methods of the Nizaris need to be discussed at some length.

It would be idle not to assume that the Nizaris after 1094 saw themselves as sole guardians of the truth in Islam, and at the same time realized their extreme isolation and vulnerability, hopelessly outnumbered as they were by both Sunnites and Twelver Shi'a and threatened by the power of the Saljuk amirs. The Nizaris were too few to mount successful military campaigns on anything other than a limited local scale, yet their aim was still nothing less than the replacement of Saljuk-Sunnite dominance with universal allegiance to their imam. How could they hope to achieve this grand aim?

It is easy for the legend of the "Assassins" to obscure the fact that the Nizaris' primary task at all times must have been the winning of converts by intensive preaching campaigns. Only the creation of strong local followings could enable an outbreak of simultaneous small-scale popular revolutions, which together would paralyse Saljuk power. This policy was most appropriate to the fragmentary nature of the Saljuk domains after Malikshah's death. It is impossible to estimate the numerical success of these preaching campaigns; such evidence does not exist. But it is very likely that the gross disparity between their numbers and the scale of their objectives, coupled with the urgency of their mission and the severity of the Sunnite response, turned the Nizaris to an

increased use of what Hodgson calls "the weapon of desperation"; assassination.⁵⁹

Assassination was not new in Islam, and indeed was common practice among the Saljuk warlords.⁶⁰ Though the Nizaris began to make much freer use of assassination than any of their contemporaries, to describe their use of this technique as systematic is to beg the question. We have no evidence of any grand plot to remove all key personnel in the Saljuk empire at one blow; this was probably quite beyond the Nizaris' numerical capacity. Their killings were selective, and usually in retaliation for some specific hurt, such as the killing of an Isma'ili. The kadi or ra'is of a town or village where the Sunnite populace had run wild and slaughtered local Isma'ilis would go in fear of his life for some time afterwards, and it is said that Nizam al-Mulk died to avenge the carpenter executed on his orders at Sawa.⁶¹ The victims were invariably Sunnite, though they ranged in rank from princes and ministers to army commanders, governors of towns and fortresses, down to local village magistrates and mayors.⁶²

As a political weapon, assassination can only remove adversaries;

59. Hodgson, p.83.

60. Hodgson, p.82. Lewis, Assassins, pp.25-26, 128-130.

61. Hodgson, p.75.

62. Juvayni/Boyle pp.678-679. One of Juvayni's remarks is suggestive of large numbers; "To record the names of all these persons [i.e. Nizari victims] would take too long".

it cannot of itself increase the size of one's movement. Yet as a defensive weapon, it carried a huge indirect advantage for the Nizaris. This was the terror inspired by assassination. The Nizaris' reputation went ahead of them.

To neutralize an adversary by terror was often far preferable to eliminating him, because as we have seen the normal Sunnite response to the murder of a public figure was to blame it on the local Isma'ilis and to massacre as many as could be found. This is perhaps why the fida'is are often represented as wearing the garb of some other distinctive group, such as the Sufis,⁶³ or equipped with a "cover-story" to deflect blame away from the Nizaris if the fida'i was questioned before his inevitable execution.⁶⁴ There are a number of indications that the Nizaris chose merely to instil terror even when their "victim" could as easily have been killed. The Sultan Sanjar, for example, once had a warning dagger stuck in the ground beside him as he slept.⁶⁵

The men who performed these deeds, the notorious fida'is, probably constituted a new rank in the Isma'ili organization. The

63. The assassin of Nizam al-Mulk was so "disguised". Juvayni/Boyle, p.677.

64. This is suggested by B. Lewis, "The Sources for the History of the Syrian Assassins", Speculum, (1952) p.489. Abu Firas, in his collection of anecdotes about the Syrian Nizari leader Rashid al-Din Sinan (1162-1193) seems to describe such a "briefing" session in anecdote XXIX; S. Guyard, "Un grand maître des Assassins au temps du Saladin", JA, 7e série, IX, (1877), p.448.

65. Juvayni/Boyle, p.682.

argument from silence leads Hodgson to doubt if they formed a separate group at first; he suggests that any willing Nizari might be chosen.⁶⁶ However, the extremely fragmentary nature of surviving Nizari evidence prevents such a silence from being completely conclusive. Hodgson himself admits that they may have formed a distinct band at Alamut by the thirteenth century.⁶⁷ Several considerations incline me to think that the fida'is were an actual organizational innovation, though whether a trained elite or a pool of willing volunteers is impossible to decide.

It seems unlikely that would-be assassins were chosen simply at random. Assassination was often the Nizaris' sole effective weapon of retaliation, and this needed to be used efficiently or their terror-inspiring reputation would suffer; they could not afford to bungle too many attempts. Even though these assignments were invariably suicidal, this is no support for the argument

66. Hodgson, p.83.

67. Hodgson, p.82, n.5. It is unfortunate that our most likely indication on this problem is not clear. This is a line in a twelfth-century Isma'ili ode where the Arabic is translated "three men from the committee (?)". This seems to suggest a separate elite of some sort, but as the translator's question mark indicates, the precise meaning of this word is not known. (W. Ivanow, "An Ismā'ili Ode in Praise of Fidawis", JBBRAS, XIV (1938), p.67; Arabic text p.70.) The word is unusual, though the root shows it is related to the idea of a group. Perhaps it is significant that the poet, when speaking of the Isma'ilis as a whole, uses the more common noun, jama'at or "following". (Arabic text, p.72 line 39).

that fanatical simpletons were used.⁶⁸ The Sunnites never fully understood the tremendous group purpose of the Nizaris, nor that their ruthlessness stemmed from devotion as much as desperation. The discipline and cohesion of the movement, and their deep commitment to their cause, would have sufficed to carry the fida'is through their grisly deeds, especially when the victim had to be "stalked" for an extended period.⁶⁹

Obviously, such missions were not proving trials leading to further promotion. They would have been regarded instead as a sought-after honour, for like all Muslims the Nizaris believed that death in the service of one's faith translated one straight to paradise. It does not accord with what is known of Hasan-i Sabbah to imagine that he would leave so vital an aspect of the movement entirely unorganized. Random selection of fida'is would have opened up opportunity for resentment and suspicions of favouritism which

68. One must beware of being misled by biased Sunni sources here. Ibn al-Kalanisi, speaking of the attempt on Buri's life in May, 1131, describes his assassins as "two simpletons from Khurasan", "chosen from amongst the ignorant members of their brotherhood". (H.A.R. Gibb, The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades", (London, 1932), p.202).

69. Despite de Sacy's proof of the derivation of the western term "assassin" (from hashish, the narcotic derived from Indian hemp), there is no mention whatsoever of the use of drugs in any Isma'ili or reputable Sunni source known to date, so that the earlier impression of the Assassins as drug-crazed fanatics must be consigned, along with stories of gardens, white cloaks, and demonstration death-leaps, to legend and hostile gossip. For the most concise up to date discussion (with full references) see B. Lewis, "Hāshishīyya", EI2, iii, pp.267-268. See also Hodgson, pp.82-83, notes 6 and 7.

might have undermined Hasan's authority.

As a separate rank, the fida'is could more easily and effectively be indoctrinated with a special sense of guardianship of the whole movement, creating a distinctive esprit de corps not shared by ordinary initiates. This does not entail going so far as the imaginative overstatement of earlier writers regarding special training in languages and disguise.⁷⁰ Even the best example of this known to me, from the Syrian Nizaris, says no more than this; Sinan wanted a message conveyed secretly to Saladin, so he called on two of his men who could speak "the Frankish tongue" and gave them each Frankish dress and Frankish swords.⁷¹ Whether as Franks or Sufis or Turks, the Nizari "disguises" seem remarkably elementary.

In view of their special responsibilities, the fida'is may have occupied a rank immediately below that of the licensed preachers and somewhat above the bulk of initiated followers. The Nizaris appear to have kept the Fatimid distinction between mustajib (ordinary initiates) and muhajir (would-be converts), while adding a variety of other names. The Guyard fragments offer such terms as "true

70. For example, E.G. Browne, A Literary History of Persia, (London 1906-1930), II, p.209, cited and criticised by Hodgson, p.83 n.7. For criticisms of Browne's description of Isma'ili da'is, see Ivanow, "The Organization of the Fatimid Propaganda", JBBRAS, XV (1939) p.2.

71. This is from Abu Firas, anecdote VIII, translated by S. Guyard, "Un grand maître des Assassins au temps du Saladin", JA, 7e série, ix (1877), pp.408-409.

believers", "affiliates", "those who respond to the call", and "children".⁷² However, by far the commonest term in the sources is rafiq (plural, rufaqa); companion or comrade.⁷³ It is not clear whether this represents any functional subdivision or, as is more likely, merely a style of greeting amongst the Nizaris.

With this slightly more detailed awareness of Nizari beliefs and organization, it is now necessary to return briefly to the fortunes of the sect after 1094. Their wariness of premature over-commitment in the struggle against Saljuk-Sunnite dominance may be deduced from their careful acquisition and consolidation of strongholds in new areas. Though we may be tolerably sure that major acquisitions would have been noted by the chroniclers, it is likely that numerous smaller strongholds, perhaps no more than fortified villages, were also taken in areas surrounding the important Isma'ili castles.

Perhaps the most important acquisition after 1094 was Girdkuh, at the eastern end of the Elburz Mountains. This fortress commanded the main road between western Persia and the eastern provinces of Khurasan and Kuhistan. Both Juvayni and Rashid al-Din relate how one of the Nizaris' secret converts high in the favour of the Saljuks, the ra'is Muzaffar, governor of Damghan, obtained permission to

72. S. Guyard, "Fragments relatifs à la doctrine des Ismaéliens", Notices et Extraits, XXII (1874), pp.278, 282.

73. Guyard, *op.cit.*, p.278; Juvayni/Boyle, p.679. See also Hodgson, p.82.

repair the old castle at Girdkuh.⁷⁴ He refortified the place and laid in provisions, obviously intending permanent occupancy. His immediate Saljuk superior, the amir Habashi, even entrusted Muzaffar with his treasure when he went out to fight against Sanjar in 1100; the amir was killed, Muzaffar kept the treasure, and then declared his open allegiance to Alamut.⁷⁵

Muzaffar held this valuable strategic site for many years, and his contribution to Nizari solidarity may perhaps be gauged from Juvayni's comment that Muzaffar was "an impregnable wall and a mighty evil".⁷⁶

A striking and unusual success for the Nizaris after 1094 was the acquisition of two fortresses, Shahdiz and Khalinjan, close by the seat of Saljuk power at Isfahan. Like Takrit in Irak, these lowland fortresses were rare exceptions to the usual Nizari pattern of expansion in remote hilly areas. These fortresses posed an acutely direct threat to Isfahan, and the Saljuks' nervousness is demonstrated by Barkyaruk's permission for another massacre of

74. Juvayni/Boyle, p.679. Rashid, cited Hodgson, p.86, n.11.

75. Hodgson, pp.86-87, with full references, Rashid (cited Hodgson, p.86, n.11) dated Girdkuh's acquisition as coming after the breach between Barkyaruk and Muhammed, i.e. 492 / 1098-1099, and Habashi's death in 493 / 1099-1100. However, Lewis, Assassins, p.50 gives the date as 1096, also citing Juvayni and Rashid. See Hodgson, pp.75-76, n.43 for a discussion of Ibn al-Athir's evidence, which places Girdkuh and other castles any time between Malikshah's death and 494 / 1100-01.

76. Juvayni/Boyle, p.679.

Isma'ilis in Isfahan in 1101.⁷⁷

The last notable stronghold taken by the Nizaris in Persia was Lammasar, in the Rudbar district near Alamut. This castle controlled the important Salambar pass across the Elburz, and with Alamut gave the Nizaris tight strategic control of the district.⁷⁸ An assault-party led by Kiya Buzurgummid entered the castle one night in September 1102, and slaughtered the Saljuk garrison. Like Muzaffar at Girdkuh, Buzurgummid improved the defences and took up permanent residence which he interrupted only to go to Alamut as Hasan-i Sabbah's successor in 1124.⁷⁹

These major acquisitions mark the limits of Nizari expansion in Persia, so far as it is known. However, the Saljuks, so long preoccupied with the war between Barkyaruk and Muhammad, were gathering forces to deal with the Nizaris once and for all. The Sultan Barkyaruk died in 1104, and soon afterwards Muhammad Tapar mounted a major offensive against Nizari possessions. Kuhistan was ravaged and Nizari power there crushed but not completely eliminated.⁸⁰ Under pressure, Takrit was finally surrendered in 1107, but not to the Saljuks; a Twelver Shi'ite amir

77. Hodgson, pp.85-86, 88-89.

78. W. Ivanow, "Alamut", Geographical Journal, (1931), p.44.

79. Juvayni/Boyle, p.679.

80. Lewis, Assassins, p.52. The Nizaris recovered, and there is to this day a strong Isma'ili element in Quhistan, especially in Qa'in. See P. Willey, "The Assassins of Qa'in", Geographical Journal, XL (1968), pp.1294-1303.

took it over.⁸¹ Muhammad Tapar himself recaptured the two Nizari fortresses close by Isfahan, yet seems to have allowed the garrisons to escape back to Alamut;⁸² perhaps a reflection of the Nizaris' by now formidable reputation as assassins. Nizari possessions in Fars and Khuzistan probably suffered similar destruction at this time, for little more is heard of them.⁸³

The main offensive, however, was against Alamut and Lammasar. From 1108 on, the crops and villages of the district were devastated each year in a war of attrition until a full-scale siege could be mounted in 1117. This appears to be the gravest crisis yet suffered by the movement, and the chroniclers say that the garrisons were near exhaustion when, in March-April 1118, news came of the death of the Sultan Muhammad. As in 1092, the besieging armies at once withdrew and dispersed, each amir anxious not to lose ground in the inevitable struggle for power around the new Sultan. They even left their siege-machines and provisions behind; a welcome bonus for the Nizaris.⁸⁴ The Saljuk counter-offensive had reached its limits for the time being, and the Nizaris set about consolidating what few possessions remained intact.

There was, however, one area of Nizari influence with which the

81. Ibn al-Athir, cited Hodgson, p.95 n.36.

82. Hodgson, p.96.

83. Lewis, Assassins, p.55; Hodgson, p.97

84. Ibn al-Athir, RHC.Or., I, pp.304-306. Hodgson, pp.97-98.

Saljuk campaign had not concerned itself. Whether because of its remoteness, or because a greater foe existed there in the form of the crusaders, or because Nizari success there had just been curtailed by a massacre, the Saljuks had not sent an army into Syria.

It is time to concentrate our attention on the Syrian da'wa of the Nizari Isma'ilis.

CHAPTER III

THE SYRIAN da^cwa; ALEPPO TO 1106

Our narrative survey of the early history of the Persian Nizaris has dwelt upon that aspect of the movement which may loosely be termed political, namely, the identification of Isma^cilism's traditional anti-Sunnite mandate with special opposition to the power of the Saljuk Turks. Yet, as was observed at the outset and implied in our consideration of their beliefs and organization, the Nizaris remain largely incomprehensible unless viewed as a religious sect. Like that of nearly every religious movement before and since, the most elementary objective of Nizari Isma^cilism was, quite simply, growth. Only by growth of numbers could their power be increased to encompass their grandiose objectives. Furthermore, they had a pressing religious obligation to rescue other sincere Isma^cilis from what the Nizaris thought was the false leadership of an imposter imam, the Fatimid Caliph Musta^cli. In short, the basic preoccupation of the Nizaris as a sect was to wean as many Isma^cilis as possible away from the Old Preaching and win them to the New.

Though Egypt was pre-eminently the centre of Isma^cilism, there were few prospects for Nizari expansion there. Undoubtedly some sort of indigenous following survived Nizar's revolt, but the Fatimid government under both al-Afdal and al-Ma'mun took elaborate precautions against the infiltration of Nizari agents from Persia.¹

1. Ibn Muyassar, Akhbar Misr, cited in S.M. Stern, "The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir", JRAS (1950), p.22.

While these security measures were strictly enforced, as they were for at least two decades, Egypt remained closed to the New Preaching.

Outside Egypt, and apart from Persia, the main areas of Isma^cili influence had been the Yemen, North Africa, Syria, and Irak. Tunisia and the Yemen were not too distant for Nizari da^cis to have reached them, but both these areas rejected the Nizari position and acknowledged the continued spiritual suzerainty of the Fatimid caliphs.² In any case, Saljuk power had not extended to these areas as it had to Persia, Irak, and Syria. From the start, the Nizaris had shown great interest in Irak as the focal point of Saljuk-Sunnite dominance, yet the only notable Nizari success there was the seizure of Takrit in 1095.³ Irak would always be a target area for Nizari opposition to the Saljuks, but prospects for sectarian expansion there were not at all bright. Consisting mostly of flat river plains and wide tracts of desert, Irak was easily controlled by the Saljuk cavalry, and the cities, where any movement had to look if it hoped to win a significant following, were strongly Sunnite as well as being Saljuk citadels. Baghdad was both the seat of the orthodox Caliphs and the nominal capital of the Saljuk Sultanate.

This left Syria as the most logical place for Nizari expansion outside Persia.

In Persia the Nizaris found that their campaign worked best

2. Hodgson, p.65.

3. as Ibn al-Athir relates it, even this was an exceptional stroke of luck; see Hodgson, pp.76-7, 80.

against a background of religious and political fragmentation, preferably in areas of difficult terrain, awkward of access for regular troops. By the end of the eleventh century, Syria was just such a place; a land of "intense geographic, social, religious, and ethnic fragmentation".⁴

Its profusion of mountain ranges, dissected plateau surfaces, enclosed valleys and fortified towns sheltered a remarkable diversity of religious minorities. Apart from Greek orthodox Christians, found mostly in and around Antioch, the Maronites formed perhaps the largest non-Muslim minority. They were settled on the north-west slopes of the Lebanon Mountains and in the Jabal Summak further north.⁵ Other non-Muslim groups included Nestorians and Jacobites, while several North Syrian towns sheltered sizeable refugee communities of Armenian Christians.⁶

The Muslim population of Syria was far from being uniformly orthodox. Sunnite predominance lay in the south, especially in and around Damascus, but in northern Syria the orthodox were almost

4. C. Cahen, "The Turkish Invasion", in K.M. Setton (general editor), the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, (Philadelphia, 1955), I, p.165.

5. H.A.R. Gibb, The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades (London, 1932), Introduction, p.27; consult Maps 3 and 4 inside the back cover for these localities. On the Maronites, see A.S. Atiya, A History of Eastern Christianity (London, 1968), pp.391-403, with references.

6. Atiya, op.cit., pp.169-208, 305-308, 329-334; see also C. Cahen "Introduction to the First Crusade", Past and Present, VI (1954), and Cahen's La Syrie du Nord à l'époque des Croisades et la Principauté Franque d'Antioche (Paris, 1940), pp.184-188; hereafter cited as Cahen, Syrie du Nord.

equalled in number by Shi'ites, the vast majority of whom were Twelvers. Some towns are known to have been mainly Shi'ite from as early as the ninth century.⁷ The Twelvers were of course the most moderate of the Shi'a, and their divergence from Orthodox Muslims was so slight that there was rarely any sectarian rancour between the two.⁸ However, other heterodox groups were not so moderate and earned the enmity of Sunnites and Twelvers alike.

The Isma'ili schismatics known to us as the Druzes had settled permanently on the northern slopes of Mount Hermon, especially in the Wadi'l-Taim, though at one time they attempted to infiltrate the Jabal Summak as well.⁹ Since their schism was still relatively recent, their attitude towards other Muslims was often hostile. Though Isma'ili in doctrine, they chose and changed their friends according to the purely practical dictates of survival.¹⁰

7. Lewis, Assassins, p.98.

8. H.A.R. Gibb, "The Caliphate and the Arab States", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, pp.96-7, reminds us that the Shi'ite-Sunni division in Islam has been grossly overrated by some western writers as an explanation of Muslim disunity at the time of the first Crusade. The real source of the disunity which enabled the crusaders to establish themselves was, as we shall shortly observe, the local jealousy and short-sighted particularism of the Syrian amirs.

9. P.K. Hitti, History of Syria (London, 1951), pp.583-586.

10. Gibb, The Damascus Chronicle, Introduction, p.27; see also Benjamin of Tudela's observations, trans. by T. Wright, (ed.) Early Travels in Palestine (London, 1848), pp.79-80.

The Druzes had in fact partially displaced another heterodox group from the Mount Hermon area. These were the Nusayris or Alawis, an esoteric Shi'ite minority which took their name from Muhammad ibn Nusayr, a partisan of the eleventh 'Alid imam, al-Hasan al-Askari (d. 260 / 873-4). They were Twelver in origin and regarded the Isma'ilis with a deep sectarian loathing because of their opposing interpretations of the true line of imams.¹¹ By the 1090's, the Nusayris were mostly found along the northern slopes of the Lebanon Mountains, in the hinterland of Jabala and Lattakia, and in the Jabal Summak.¹²

Far more significant for the Nizari campaign, however, were the indigenous Syrian Isma'ilis. Though we have no numerical evidence, it seems likely that the Isma'ilis were one of the largest heterodox Muslim groups next to the Twelvers. This is suggested by the fact that Fatimid political control of Syria, secure by the second quarter of the eleventh century and diminished only since the appearance of the Turks (c.1070), was accompanied by an intensive

11. see L. Massignon, article "Nuṣayrī", EI, iii, pp.963-967; Hitti, History of Syria, pp.585-7; S. Guyard, "Un grand maître des Assassins", JA, 7e série, IX (1877), pp.349-350, and "Le Fetwa d' Ibn Taimiyyah sur les Nosairis", JA, 6e série, XVIII (1871), pp.158-162, 178-198.

12. Gibb, The Damascus Chronicle, Introduction, p.28; large numbers of Nusayris were slaughtered in the course of the first Crusade; see Bar Hebraeus (Abu'l-Faraj), The Chronography, trans. E.A.W. Budge, (Oxford, 1932), p.235.

propaganda campaign.¹³ Fatimid da'is seem, ironically, to have had more success in Syria than among the peasants of Egypt itself.¹⁴ In 1051 the Caliph Mustansir sent his chief da'i to Aleppo to direct the campaign, which at that time was aimed against the 'Abbasids.¹⁵ As a result of this activity, the Fatimids created sizeable Isma'ili communities, not only in the Shi'ite north, in Aleppo and the Jazr and Jabal Summak, but also in the coastal cities under their control and even in Damascus itself.¹⁶ As early as 1036-7 we hear of a Druze missionary hopefully appealing for converts among the Isma'ilis then established in the Jabal Summak.¹⁷ In the Jazr, the traditionally Shi'ite town of Sarmin seems to have become something of an Isma'ili centre, so much so that before 1095 the leading Sunnites of the town, the Banu'l-Sufi, judged it prudent to

13. Gibb, "The Caliphate and the Arab States", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.89.

14. see M. Canard, article "Fāṭimids", EI2, ii, p.859.

15. 'Ārif Tāmīr, 'Alā Abwab Alamūt (Harisa, Lebanon, 1959), p.7, cited in Mirza, op.cit., p.12. See also M. Canard, "L'Impérialisme des Fatimides et leur propagande", Annales de l'Institut d'études Orientales, (Algier), IV (1942-47), pp.169-185.

16. Gibb, The Damascus Chronicle, Introduction, pp.16-17.

17. S. de Sacy, Exposé de la Religion des Druzes (Paris, 1838), I, dviii, cited by B. Lewis, "The Ismā'īlites and the Assassins", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.112.

remove themselves to Damascus.¹⁸

It is to be assumed that the Syrian Isma'ilis adopted the Musta'lian allegiance in 1094; loyalty to the Fatimids was strong in Syria for many years yet.¹⁹

With a considerable body of indigenous Isma'ilis to be won from the Old Preaching, and with numerous other heterodox sectaries, some of whom might conceivably be persuaded to adopt Nizari Isma'ilism, Syria obviously had great potential for the Nizari campaign.

But this was not all. The extreme political fragmentation of late eleventh century Syria offered the Nizaris almost ideal working conditions.

Saljuk power in Syria had been secured in a campaign launched by the Sultan Malikshah in 1077. This was led by the Sultan's brother, Tutush, who was given a free hand to conquer all he could from Fatimids and Turkish adventurers alike.²⁰ He was strikingly successful; only Aleppo and the Fatimid coastal cities eluded his grasp. Indeed, Malikshah was so alarmed at his brother's power

18. C. Cahen, "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du Moyen Âge", *Arabica*, V (1958), p.237, citing (in MS.) Ibn Asakir, Ta'rikh madinat Dimashk, and Kamal al-Din ibn al-'Adim, Bughyat at-talab fi ta'rikh Halab.

19. Hodgson, p.70; when the Shi'ite citizens of Afamiya wanted a governor of their own faith in 1096, they sent to Cairo and were given a ruler who professed Musta'lian Isma'ilism. (Ibn Muyassar, Akhbar Misr, extracts translated RHC. Or., III, pp.461.)

20. Abu'l-Fida, Mukhtasar ta'rikh al-bashar; abridged translation, RHC. Or., I, p.1.

that he twice stepped in to prevent Tutush from occupying Aleppo.²¹ When Malikshah died in 1092, Tutush made a bid for the sultanate, but was distracted by the intrigues of the Syrian amirs. He finally routed their combined forces in 1094 and occupied in turn Aleppo, Edessa, and Mosul. He then entered Persia to make good his claims, only to be defeated and killed near Rayy in February 1095.²²

The death of Tutush initiated in Syria what French historians aptly describe as "le morcellement politique".²³ Aleppo fell to Tutush's son Fakhr al-Muluk Ridwan, and Damascus to Ridwan's younger brother Shams al-Muluk Dukak. Real power in both palaces probably lay with their atabegs, Janah al-Dawlah and Zahir al-Din Tughtakin. An intense rivalry which developed between the two sons of Tutush now took precedence in a situation already complicated by the jealousies and divisions of the lesser amirs. For example, the governor of Antioch, Yaghi Siyan, would have allied with Aleppo but he detested Ridwan's atabeg, so Antioch aligned itself instead with Damascus and waged war on Aleppo.²⁴ Shifting patterns of conflict between Aleppo and Damascus and their respective allies characterized Syrian politics just prior to the first Crusade. Religion had long ceased to be a first cause; the realpolitik of self-interest and

21. Gibb, The Damascus Chronicle, Introduction, p.20.

22. Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.2; see also The Cambridge History of Iran, volume V, The Saljuq and Mongol Periods, ed. J.A. Boyle, (Cambridge, 1968), pp.102-108.

23. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.177.

24. Gibb, The Damascus Chronicle, Introduction, pp.21, 23, 30.

particularism held the field almost completely.²⁵

The pattern changed slightly in 1097. Ridwan at Aleppo quarrelled bitterly with his atabeg who promptly went off and seized Hims, an important town midway between Aleppo and Damascus. Here, exploiting the conflict between the two cities, Janah created a small but enduring principality.

Hims was not the only independent local principality. No more striking evidence of Syrian political fragmentation after 1095 is to be had than the survival of a group of petty Muslim principalities dotted between Antioch and Damascus. Most had been established by local Arab dynasties, and ranged in size and influence from those of the Banu^cAmmar at Tripoli or the Banu Munkidh at Shaizar to the tiny enclaves of the Banu^cAmrun at al-Khaf, the Banu Muhriz at Marqab and Qadmus, and the Banu Sulaiha at Jabala.²⁶

The most recent of the petty principalities was that of Afamiya, created by the notorious adventurer Khalaf ibn Mula^cib. He had been appointed by the Fatimid government in 1096 in response to a plea from the populace for a ruler of their own faith, but soon showed that he was interested in hunting and brigandage rather than good government.²⁷

Before the end of the eleventh century, two further segments

25. see H.A.R. Gibb, "Notes on the Arabic Materials for the History of the Early Crusades," BSOS, VII (1935), pp.740, 743-4.

26. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.180.

27. Ibn Muyassar, Akhbar Misr, extracts transl. RHC. Or., III, p.461. See also N. Elisséeff, article "Hims," EI2, iii, p.398.

were added to the political mosaic of Syria and upper Mesopotamia. These were the creations of the first Crusade, two principalities named after the cities upon which their existence depended; Antioch and Edessa. Indeed, at first these Christian states consisted of little more than the two cities and a cluster of key towns and fortresses around them. Both principalities were short of manpower, and could control but never colonize their territories. The native peasantry remained, paying taxes to their new rulers just as they had to Byzantine, Muslim, and Turkish governors before them, and the commercial life of towns and cities went on much as before. Edessa was a curiously shapeless creation, lacking natural boundaries, but its cities were wealthy and the crusaders (or Franks as they were called) enjoyed the support of widespread Armenian christian elements. Antioch was the stronger of the two, a vigorous and expansionist state under Bohemond I and his regent Tancred. Antioch's natural line of expansion was to the east and south, across the Orontes, where a group of fortress towns formed Aleppo's western outworks; Artah, Atharib, Zerdana, Kafarlata, Ma^carrat Misrin, Fua, Sarmin, Albara, Ma^carrat al-Nu^rman, to name but a few. This area between the two cities was to become a scene of constantly shifting border warfare in the next few decades. Aleppo was the focal point of the new balance of forces established in the north and constituted a major obstacle to Latin domination of northern Syria. The Franks never

succeeded in capturing the city.²⁸

Though Antioch itself was larger, Aleppo was clearly the hub of northern Syria in our period, and it is scarcely surprising that when we first hear of a Nizari "presence" in Syria, it is at Aleppo.

Since the Arab conquest in the seventh century, Aleppo had grown to be a rich and populous city, thriving on its industries and the long distance trade which flowed through it. Aleppo's fortifications were splendid. A massive wall encircled the city, while in the middle, making full use of the defensive potential of an ancient flat-topped tell, stood a strong and impressive citadel surrounded by an immense ditch or fosse. As well as being a city, Aleppo was a vast fortress.²⁹

Like Hasan-i Sabbah's choice of Alamut, Aleppo was the most obvious and logical place to commence the Nizari campaign in Syria. In its religious composition, Aleppo was strikingly a microcosm of northern Syria. The Sunnites were almost equalled in number by Twelver Shi'ites, and taken altogether, ignoring the gulfs between Twelvers, Isma'ilis, Druzes and Nusayris, the Shi'ites of Aleppo probably outnumbered the orthodox.³⁰ Indeed, for a few years before

28. Detailed accounts of the crusaders' establishment in northern Syria are available in Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.205-266; S. Runciman, A History of the Crusades (Cambridge, 1951-2), I, (hereafter cited as Runciman), especially pp.203-262, 318-322; and R. Grousset, Histoire des Croisades et du Royaume Franque de Jérusalem, (Paris, 1934-36), tome I, pp.68-119, 369-395.

29. J. Sauvaget, article "Halab", EI2, iii, pp.85-87; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.154-5.

30. Hodgson, pp.71, 91; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.189; J. Sauvaget, Alep (Bibliothèque Archéologique et historique, XXXVI, Paris, 1941), pp.95-98, citing the evidence of Ibn al-Furat for the Shi'ite preponderance in Aleppo.

the Saljuks seized the place, Aleppo was ruled by a Shi'ite dynasty, the 'Uqailids of Mosul.³¹

Conditions within Aleppo at the end of the eleventh century could not have been much better for the Nizari campaign. The battles, changes of dynasty, and severe taxation wrought by the Turkish invasion had seriously disrupted the city's trade and food supply, even before the crusaders began their destructive raiding. By the close of the century, Aleppo's fabled prosperity had almost vanished, and economic distress was reflected in the increasing restlessness and turbulence of its populace. There is also evidence that the normal machinery of civic government was beginning to give way to vicious sectional self-determination.³² We have already observed that the Isma'ili preaching, with its promises of justice and an end to oppression and misery, possessed a remarkably strong appeal for victims of social and economic dislocation.³³

Altogether, prospects for the Nizari campaign at Aleppo seem to have been good. The actual beginnings of the da'wa, however, remain shadowy. The sources do not tell us exactly when Nizari missionaries first appeared in Aleppo; nor can we reasonably expect them to. Initial Nizari activity would have been small-scale, and conducted quietly if not in secret. Hence our earliest direct

31. C. Cahen, "The Turkish Invasion", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, pp.151-2.

32. Sauvaget, Alep, pp.107-8.

33. See above, p.13.

references show the da'wa as an established functioning entity.³⁴ Obviously, the foundation of the da'wa occurred sometime earlier but how much earlier it is very difficult to assess, for the indications on this problem are contradictory.

On the one hand, the Nizaris quickly became notorious in Persia for their use of selective assassination and this reputation spread far afield in the Muslim world, into areas where they were otherwise unknown. It could be argued from this that notice would be taken of them fairly soon wherever they appeared. On the other hand, we cannot judge how long it would take the pioneering da'is to build up a recognizable movement from clandestine small-scale beginnings. One writer has suggested that the Nizaris had something of a prolonged struggle against ingrained Fatimid loyalties in their efforts to convert the Syrian Isma'ilis to the New Preaching.³⁵

The question of dating the beginnings of the da'wa must therefore be approached open-mindedly; da'is from Alamut may have arrived in Syria only shortly before the sect is first mentioned in Syrian sources, but on the other hand, they may have been working quietly for some years before.

34. B. Lewis, "The Sources for the History of the Syrian Assassins," Speculum, XXVII (1952), p.489. Our sources are almost entirely chronicles, which notice the Nizaris only when they are involved in some striking event, such as a battle, a massacre, an attempt on a castle, or an assassination. For the silent gaps between such isolated references, we have to rely on circumstantial evidence combined with whatever scraps of retrospective information the chroniclers choose to include from time to time.

35. Hodgson, p.70.

The first mention of Nizaris in Syria, from the sources available to me, occurs in A.H. 495 (1101-02).³⁶ It is evident from the episode described and the chronicler's general observations that the sectaries were already well-established at Aleppo by this time. (We shall shortly return to this first mention in more detail.) From this date, most modern writers on the Syrian Nizaris have been content to suggest that the da'wa must have been established in or before 1100.³⁷ Earlier writers, however, were somewhat bolder than this. Étienne Quatremère, in his pioneering essay on the Syrian Isma'ilis, chose the very start of Ridwan's reign as the date for the da'wa's inception, and says that they had a place in Aleppo "pendant toute la durée de son règne".³⁸ Though Quatremère gives no references for this, his opinions still deserve respect; he made intensive use of early manuscript materials containing extracts from

36. Kamal al-Din ibn al-'Adim, Zubdat al-Halab fi ta'rikh Halab; abridged French translation, RHC. Or., III, pp.589-590. (All subsequent references to Kamal are to the Zubdat unless otherwise stated.)

37. Hodgson, p.89; Lewis, Assassins, p.99; Cahen, Syrie du Nord p.189.

38. É. Quatremère, "Notice historique sur les Ismaéliens," Fundgruben des Orients, IV (1809), p.341. (Hereafter cited as Quatremère.) The date he offers is manifestly a type-setter's error; 498 is 1104-05. He may have intended 489, or 1095-6; the first year of Ridwan's reign..

otherwise lost contemporary chronicles.³⁹ Nearly half a century after Quatremère, M.C. Defrémery suggested that Hasan-i Sabbah would have sent da^cis into Syria as soon as he was established at Alamut, and that Ridwan's support at Aleppo was obtained in the closing years of the century.⁴⁰ Indeed, our information being so fragmentary, we must allow that informal contacts may have existed between the Syrian and Persian Isma^cilis before the 1094 schism. Hasan-i Sabbah himself travelled through Syria on his way to Egypt in 1078 and probably returned to Persia that way. The opportunity was always there.

The earliest possible dating for the inception of a Nizari da^cwa in Syria would therefore be straight after the schism, in 1095 or 1096. The gap between this dating and the earliest Nizari mention in our sources either indicates that progress was slow at first, that

39. Lewis, "Sources . . .", *Speculum* XXVII (1952), p.478; see also C. Cahen, "Une chronique Chiite au temps des Croisades," *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, (1938), pp.258-269. The only support I have found for Quatremère's dating is a phrase in the chronicle of Abu'l-Mahasin, trans. RHC. Or., III, p.497, which says of Ridwan: "from the first, he constructed in Aleppo a propaganda centre" (for the Nizaris). However, I suspect that this is either a stylistic flourish or a slip in the translation. A similar phrase appears in Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.530, which is translated; (Ridwan) "was the first to build for them in that town a mission-house".

40. M.C. Defrémery, "Nouvelles recherches sur les Ismaéliens ou Batinien de Syrie," Part I, *Journal Asiatique*, 5e série, III (1854), p.376, hereafter cited as Defrémery. His dates are also slightly in error here; he dates Hasan's occupation of Alamut as 1092 rather than 1090.

unforeseen problems and obstacles were encountered which delayed the open establishment of the movement, or that da^cis did not arrive from Persia until about 1100. A closer look at what little we know of the early activity of the da^cwa may suggest which is the likelier possibility.

The da^ci credited with the founding of the Syrian da^cwa is named in several of our sources, and in fact is the occasion for our first notice of the Nizaris in Syria. He apparently involved himself in the feud between Ridwan and Janah al-Dawlah, and was with Ridwan at Sarmin sometime in 1101-02 when Janah fell on their camp by surprise and sacked it. Ridwan and most of his entourage managed to escape and fled to Aleppo, though Ridwan's wazir Abu'l-Fadl was among those taken captive and later held for ransom.

Our chronicler tells us that while Janah was sacking the camp, he searched in particular for "the Batinian physician-astrologer, but could not find him". We are further told that "it was this man who had caused him to quarrel with Ridwan", and that the physician-astrologer was one of those who reached Aleppo safely.⁴¹ Kamal al-Din is not, of course, a contemporary witness, but he uses contemporary materials with remarkable fidelity and will be our major source for north Syrian affairs. Our main contemporary source, the Damascus Chronicle of Ibn al-Kalanisi, enlightens us a little further in an entry for the following year, which states that "the

⁴¹. Kamal al-Din, RHC. Or., III, pp.589-590.

person known as al-Hakim al-Munajjim the Batini, a member of the entourage of the king Fakhr al-Muluk Rudwan, \ lord of Aleppo, was the first to profess the doctrines of the Batiniya in Aleppo and Syria."⁴²

These two brief entries contain virtually all we know about the founding da'i at this stage. We have his occupational surname - al-Hakim al-Munajjim being literally translated as "physician-astrologer" - but no personal name, no patronymics, no place of origin. However, the name is Persian, so we do know his nationality, and this confirms the assumption - there is no more direct evidence - that the Syrian da'wa was led from the start by Persian da'is. We are given no further details of this man's role in the dispute between Ridwan and Janah, but the most significant piece of information is that his centre of operations was Aleppo, where he was actually part of Ridwan's entourage.

Nearly all our sources have something to say about Ridwan's support and protection of the Nizaris at Aleppo. This is of central importance to our estimation of the da'wa's achievement, for we are at liberty to wonder whether the Nizaris could have attained such rapid growth and early prominence in Syrian affairs without his support. Kamal al-Din continues his entry of A.H. 495 with this

42. Ibn al-Kalanisi, Dhail Ta'rikh Dimashki; trans. H.A.R. Gibb, The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades (London, 1932), p.58 (hereafter cited as Kalanisi). I suspect that Kalanisi may make earlier mention of the Nizaris than this, because Lewis (in "Sources . . .", Speculum, XXVII (1952), p.484 n.50) has warned that Gibb's abridged translation contains "most, though not all", of Kalanisi's references to the Nizaris.

statement:

"It was this prince who, being won over to the cause of the Batiniens, let them multiply in Aleppo. He declared himself their partisan and protector, giving them high positions, letting their power grow day by day. He even authorized the establishment of a house of propaganda for them in Aleppo. Deaf to the entreaties of other princes, Ridwan never abandoned these beliefs." ⁴³

Why should this Saljuk prince support and protect a group of heterodox sectaries whose manifest objective was the overthrow of Saljuk power? Kamal al-Din offers the simplest and most obvious explanation; that Ridwan was himself converted to Nizari Isma^cilism. This would, of course, be the natural conclusion of orthodox contemporaries, at a loss to explain otherwise why Ridwan was friendly towards the Nizaris. The air was heavy with suspicion in these years, and many Twelver Shi^cites were unjustly accused of dealings with the "Batiniis". ⁴⁴ Since we cannot presume to investigate Ridwan's personal convictions from this distance of time, we cannot categorically deny that he sympathised with their doctrines, but it is most unlikely that he ever professed them openly. He was unpopular enough with his orthodox and Twelver Shi^cite subjects, and his open conversion would almost certainly have provoked a major rebellion. Arguments which would justify his keeping such a conversion secret in fact

43. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.590.

44. One example is the destruction of the amir Saif al-Dawla Sadaka by the Saljuk governor of Irak, who managed to persuade the Sultan that this amir was a secret Nizari; our chronicler observes that he was merely an ordinary Shi^cite. (Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil at-Tawarikh; abridged translation, RHC. Or., I, pp.247-8.)

indicate a more plausible explanation, namely, that Ridwan's understanding with the Nizaris was a purely practical one, a classic mariage de convenance for both parties. To establish this, we must examine Ridwan's military and political circumstances at Aleppo.

Tutush's expeditions into the Jazira and Persia in pursuit of the sultanate had drawn the main body of Turks away from Syria, leaving the Turkish amirs there with an acute shortage of troops, especially cavalry.⁴⁵ Ridwan's effective military power therefore rested as much on local levies as on the Turks of his 'askar. This position was acutely worsened by his atabeg's desertion in 1097, for Janah took many of the best troops with him. Ridwan's own forces could assert his authority well enough in rural areas, but by themselves were inadequate to meet serious invasion threats. Perhaps even more significant for our present subject, Ridwan's Turkish cavalry were too blunt an instrument for securing his authority within Aleppo itself. He could not afford to alienate the people from whom he derived his revenue because he relied on their local militia groups (ahdath) to supplement his 'askar on campaigns and in time of siege.

The ahdath were essentially the armed bands of the craft guilds, but they were also the instruments of various city factions. Because they combined military power with the expression of popular opinion, no ruler could afford to ignore them.⁴⁶ Indeed, in time of emergency,

45. C. Cahen, "The Turkish Invasion", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, pp.164-5.

46. Sauvaget, Alep, pp.96-7.

the supreme commander of the ahdath was the virtual ruler of the city outside the citadel. This powerful role was traditionally that of the ra'is of the city, who often drew his lieutenants or sharifs from his own family or faction.⁴⁷ The riyasa at Aleppo was traditionally in the power of the leading Sunnite family, the Banu'l-Badi', but they shared civic leadership with the leading Twelver Shi'ite family, the Banu'l-Khashshab, who supplied the city with its kadis or magistrates. Whatever their personal rivalries, the loyalties of both families were intensely Aleppine; they hopefully regarded Saljuk rule as no more than a sort of Turkish intermezzo.⁴⁸ Their suspicion of Ridwan was so deep, and their control of the city factions so effective, that Ridwan was denied any popular following in Aleppo.

Thus, in addition to his military weakness, Ridwan's authority in the city itself was narrowly circumscribed and his position was politically precarious. This meant that he could not afford to be fastidious in his choice of supporters; he would clutch at anything which would help shore up his power.

An example of this, and a possible indication of how little doctrinaire religious loyalty mattered to Ridwan, appears in 1097.

47. C. Cahen, "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du Moyen Âge," Arabica, V (1958), pp.237-241.

48. Ibn abi-Tayy, from Ibn ash-Shihnah, ad-Dur al-Muntakhab; trans. J. Sauvaget, Les Perles Choiesies d'Ibn ash-Shihnah (Beirut, 1933), pp.27, 62-64; Ibn al-Furat, cited in Cahen, "Mouvements populaires . . .", Arabica, V (1958), p.242.

When Janah left him, Ridwan sent to Cairo, offering his allegiance in return for aid. The imam-Caliph Mustá'li's name was duly included in the khutba in place of the 'Abbasid caliph's on 29 August 1097. But as time passed and no troops came, Ridwan testily switched allegiance back to Baghdad.⁴⁹

How could the Nizaris be of use to Ridwan? Quite simply, by providing him with an organized body of support within the city to counterbalance to some extent the armed bands of the guilds and city notables, and to provide Ridwan with levies whose loyalty would be to him rather than to the city in time of siege.

Though the earliest direct reference to Nizari militia at Aleppo is not until 1111,⁵⁰ it is reasonable to assume that the sectaries developed a disciplined force at a very early date, both to prevent intimidation of sympathisers by the Sunnite ahdath, and simply to protect themselves. In the anarchic conditions prevailing at Aleppo in these years, street fights and assaults on members of rival factions were apparently commonplace.⁵¹ As their following grew stronger, the Nizaris could offer protection to Ridwan's agents

49. Ibn Muyassar, Akhbar Misr; extracts trans. RHC. Or., III, pp.461-462, giving 17 Ramadan, 490. Abu l-Mahasin, an-Nujum az-Zahira; extracts trans. RHC. Or., III, p.486 gives the wrong date and represents the initiative as coming from al-Afdal and Mustá'li. P.K. Hitti, A History of Syria (London, 1951) p.575 states that the duration of Ridwan's temporary Fatimid allegiance was only a month; but no references are given.

50. Kalanisi, p.115.

51. Sauvaget, Alep, pp.107-108; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.195-6.

and officials in the city and act on his behalf against critics and enemies. In return, his patronage and the ultimate threat of bloody subjugation by his 'askar shielded the Nizaris from the violent opposition of Sunnite and Twelver factions.

Ridwan therefore had sufficient grounds for welcoming the Nizaris' alliance without actually becoming one of their adherents. His military and political enfeeblement and his apparent lack of doctrinaire scruples are more than adequate to explain his attitude. There are other indications as well which make his conversion seem unlikely. The Shi'ite chronicler Ibn abi-Tayy states that Ridwan so feared the "Isma'ilis" in Aleppo that he preferred not to use the main gateway to the citadel. Instead, he had an old tunnel which led from the courtyard to a cellar somewhere in the city secretly renovated and fitted with a staircase.⁵²

If Ridwan's dealings with the Nizaris were on a purely practical mutual-aid basis, and were motivated as much by fear as necessity, we may hazard at last a guess as to the date of the da'wa's establishment, Ridwan's need for support became desperate only after Janah had deserted him, when the Fatimids had failed to provide aid and the first Crusade had given him new, vigorous, and hostile neighbours. All this happened in 1097-8, so it is unlikely that the Nizaris achieved open power and recognition in Aleppo before 1098. In order

52. Ibn abi-Tayy, preserved in Dhahabi and quoted from that source in Sibṭ ibn al-ʿAjami, Kunūz ad-dhahab fī taʾrīkh Ḥalab; trans. J. Sauvaget, Les Trésors d'Or (Beirut, 1950), p.162.

for them to be useful to Ridwan, their numbers would have had to be sufficient to mount a force of militia, and it is doubtful if this could have been done in a short time. Therefore, while it seems safe to assume that the Nizaris were allied with Ridwan in 1099 or 1100, the beginnings of the da'wa could date back to the early years of Ridwan's reign, to 1096 or 1097.⁵³

The most obvious indication of Ridwan's support for the Nizaris would have been the town house he gave them as a dar al-da'wa or propaganda centre. Later Sunnite chroniclers hold this up in pious horror as evidence of Ridwan's depravity fully comparable to the murder of his two brothers when he came to power, but no date is given for this transfer to the Nizaris, nor any details of its size or its location in the city.⁵⁴ Nevertheless such official recognition was indeed a triumph. This was the first time any Nizari da'wa had been able to work openly in a city that was under nominal Saljuk control.⁵⁵ Kalanisi has already informed us that al-Hakim al-Munajjim

53. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.189 thinks that Nizari activity began in Syria about the time that the first Crusade made its appearance; S. Guyard, "Un grand maître des Assassins au temps de Saladin", Journal Asiatique, 7e série, IX (1877), pp.347-8, also suggested this.

54. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.590; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, Mir'at az-Zaman; extracts trans. RHC. Or., III, pp.530, 548-9; Abu'l-Mahasin, RHC. Or., III, pp.496-7, who says Ridwan actually had it built for the Nizaris; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.12; Ibn Taghribirdi, RHC. Or., III, pp.481-2; Ibn ash-Shihna, trans. Sauvaget, Les Perles Choiesies, p.27.

55. See Hodgson, pp.77-8, 88-9; the Nizaris at Isfahan always had to keep underground, and even this did not prevent occasional massacres at the hands of Sunnite zealots.

was one of Ridwan's entourage; if Kamal's statement that Ridwan gave the Nizaris "high positions" is to be relied on, it would appear that the Nizaris were as much in evidence about the citadel as about their dar al-da'wa.⁵⁶

What little the chroniclers have to say of the Nizaris' everyday activity in Aleppo takes the form of complaints at their arrogant and violent behaviour. We are told that they could commit crimes with impunity because those charged with the enforcement of the law were afraid of the sectaries' organized vengeance. There are tales of women and children being abducted from crowded streets, and of vicious attacks on individual members of rival sects or armed bands. Nobody would dare interfere on these occasions, and even the victims offered no resistance to the indignities or violence inflicted on them. Criminals would declare themselves Nizaris simply to take advantage of their reputation and to benefit from their corporate protection.⁵⁷ It seems that if you wanted protection from an enemy or an injury done to somebody, you called first on the Nizaris to see what they could arrange for you!⁵⁸

From the picture conveyed by such complaints it would appear that the Nizaris gained their following by intimidation and terror;

56. Kalanisi, p.58; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.590.

57. These details are from Kamal al-Din's Zubdat, quoted in Quatremère, p.341, and Defrémery, p.377; they are omitted from the abridged Recueil translation.

58. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.603.

their detractors would have it that all their conversions were of this sort, if not of criminals or half-wits.⁵⁹ Yet the extraordinary cohesion and vitality of the movement should restrain us from cynically denying them any sincere conversions at all. Undoubtedly, some may have feigned conversion or sympathy out of fear, but the core of the following could only consist of those persuaded by preaching and instruction and admitted through the degrees of initiation.

It is impossible to make precise judgments about the mainsprings of response to any religious movement, human nature exhibiting itself in so many infinite variations, but in the case of the Nizaris we may be sure that there was a mixture of motivation. The traditional appeal of Isma'ilism, with its warmly emotional mystical style of belief, would be attractive to many Shi'ites who yearned for a more vibrant faith. Others may have been attracted more by the Nizari promise of social justice in a better order to replace that of Saljuk-Sunnite dominance, Others yet may have been attracted by the methods the Nizaris employed in their struggle, by the prospect of subversive or even violent opposition to constituted authority. A few may have felt more secure in a group which jealously defended its members and exacted revenge for the smallest of injuries. Examples might be multiplied indefinitely.⁶⁰ What we do know, if our sources are to be believed, is that the number of Nizaris in Aleppo grew rapidly under Ridwan's protection.⁶¹ However much threats or intimidation

59. Kalanisi, pp.180, 187-8.

60. Defrémery, p.377.

61. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.590.

contributed to this increase, we may envisage the Persian da'is at Aleppo engaged in a daily round of preaching, argument, refutation, discussion and planning, all directed towards the steady expansion and consolidation of the da'wa.

The Syrian da'wa's first recorded essay in the technique which had made the Persian Nizaris notorious was not, it seems, the first Blow of a campaign against Saljuk power in Syria. It was rather the sequel to al-Hakim al-Manajjim's 1101 interference in the dispute between Ridwan and his former atabeg, Janah al-Dawlah, for it appears to have been intended primarily to gratify Ridwan and ensure his continued patronage at Aleppo. Janah's superior military strength had made Ridwan nervous of their continued estrangement, and he sought a reconciliation early in 1103. Janah was persuaded to make a brief visit to Aleppo, where Ridwan played the perfect host for about ten days. But Janah gave no assurances and no hint of any change in attitude before he returned to Hims.⁶²

Perhaps al-Hakim al-Munajjim now saw a first-rate opportunity to show his usefulness to Ridwan and acted on his own initiative, or perhaps Ridwan, desperate that his peacemaking had failed, asked his only allies to employ their premeditated art. Whoever originally inspired it, fida'is were despatched on a mission to Hims.⁶³

62. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.590; who observes in passing that there could be no hope of reconciliation between such sworn rivals.

63. Kamal's apportioning of the blame is characteristic of our sources; he blames al-Hakim al-Munajjim directly, but adds "it was said that this was done with the connivance if not at the order of Ridwan." RHC. Or., III, p.591.

The fida'is chose a Friday for their attempt, when Janah would come down to the main mosque for the midday prayer, the leading congregational service of the Muslim week. Janah took the usual precautions when he ventured forth from the citadel; he was in full armour and surrounded by his officers and bodyguards. But when he came into the mosque, a shaikh in the congregation gave a pre-arranged signal and three men dressed as religious ascetics leapt upon Janah and stabbed him to death before anybody realised what was happening. Janah's officers and guards rushed to defend their master, and the assassins managed to kill some of these as well before they were themselves hacked to death.

Retribution followed swiftly, but upon innocent heads. Less than a dozen Sufis, Persians and other "foreigners" who happened to be worshipping in the mosque at the time were slaughtered by the guards as suspected accomplices. Probably the shaikh perished with them. The service could not be held for the citizens fled, panic-stricken, and everything in the city, we are told, fell into confusion. Significantly, all the Turks left the city in great haste. These would be mostly Janah's troops and their families, and their departure is more likely to reflect fear of being massacred as "foreigners" than any widespread suspicion of Turkish or Saljuk instigation of Janah's death. The assassins appear to have been identified fairly readily as Nizaris from Aleppo, but it is of interest that they were Persians.⁶⁴ Was the Syrian da'wa as

64. Kalanisi, pp.57-8; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.591; Ibn al-Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.213; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.525. See also, Quatremère, p.342; Defrémery, pp.377-8; and Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.236.

yet too young to have produced its own fida'is?

Though the sources are agreed on the essential features of the assassination, there is some slight difference of opinion as to the dating. Kalanisi gives only the year, A.H. 496 (1102-03) but Kamal says it occurred on Friday, 22 Rajab 496, which is 1 May 1103.⁶⁵ He doubtless derives this from the contemporary and near contemporary sources he utilizes in his more detailed Bughyat at-talab fi ta'rikh Halab. Here, Ibn Asakir and Murhaf ibn Usamah agree on A.H. 496, while Munqidh ibn Munqidh offers 28 Rajab, but Usamah ibn Munqidh is quoted as giving orally 22 Rajab, which Kamal prefers. The anonymous Bustan al-Jami' and the Ta'rikh of al-Azimi concur with Kamal's adopted dating.⁶⁶ In spite of this wealth of contemporary testimony, Ibn al-Athir assigns Janah's death to the previous year, A.H. 495 (1101-02) and relates it to the Franks' siege of Hisn al-Akrad. This earlier dating may be disregarded. Athir's chronology is in evident confusion at this

65. Kalanisi, pp.56-7; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.590; the Recueil conversion of this date is incorrect.

66. All these references I owe to B. Lewis, "Sources . . .," Speculum XXVII (1952), p.486, though I was able at least to check the year given in the Bustan from Cahen's edition of the Arabic, "Une Chronique Syrienne du VIe/XIIe siècle", in Bulletin d'études orientales de l'Institut Français de Damas, VII-VIII (1938), p.115. The Recueil version of the Bughyat is heavily abridged, omitting all reference to Janah's death, and it is unfortunate that the extracts translated in J. Sauvaget, "Extraits du Bugyat at-talab d' Ibn al-Adim", REI, VII (1933), pp.393-409 do not include these passages; p.403 merely mentions Janah's assassination by Isma'ilis disguised as Sufis.

point,⁶⁷ and two modern historians have charged him with deliberate misdating in order to heighten what the thirteenth century was as Ridwan's betrayal of Muslim unity.⁶⁸ This seems preferable to the ingenious solution of two others who have combined Kamal's date with Athir's year.⁶⁹

The immediate consequence of Janah's death was a race for the possession of Hims. Janah's widow, who was also Ridwan's mother, urgently sent to Aleppo, but Janah's officers, respecting his feelings towards Ridwan, secretly sent to Dukak at Damascus. In fact, Raymond of Toulouse was closer to Hims than anyone else when news spread of Janah's death, and he appeared before the city only a few days later. He was apparently content to receive tribute while he went to find a more defensible camp at al-Restan from which to conduct a regular siege. He had barely departed when troops from Damascus arrived and took possession of the city and the citadel. When Ridwan's advance party arrived a little later, they were denied access, and reported back to Ridwan at al-Kubba

67. He treats as two different sets of events what are in fact duplicate accounts of the same year, misled by a difference of dates in his sources, one of which is wrong. See W.B. Stevenson, The Crusaders in the East (Cambridge, 1907), p.46 n.1, hereafter cited as Stevenson.

68. Lewis, "Sources . . .," Speculum, XXVII (1952), p.486; N. Éliasséeff, article "Himş," EI2, iii, p.398.

69. Producing 12 May 1102; Defrémery, pp.377-8; R. Grousset, Histoire des Croisades et du Royaume Franque de Jérusalem (Paris, 1934-6), I, pp.338-340.

that Dukak had forestalled them. The Franks also heard of the Damascene occupation, and after keeping at a discreet distance for a time, gave up their plans for a siege and withdrew.⁷⁰

The result of Janah's death was thus not at all what Ridwan or al-Hakim al-Munajjim doubtless hoped for; Hims became a dependency of Damascus, not Aleppo. Yet the Nizaris could congratulate themselves on an effective display of their potential usefulness, and we may be sure the lesson was not lost on Ridwan. Janah's elimination definitely eased Ridwan's position, which was to be increasingly threatened over the next decade by the Franks of Antioch.

The founder of the da'wa and chief da'i of the Nizaris at Aleppo did not long survive his first notable victim. The death of al-Hakim al-Munajjim was reported just a few weeks after the episode at Hims.⁷¹ Though it is to be assumed that he died of natural causes, his death was apparently sudden, and at least one source hints at foul play.⁷² Whatever the truth of the matter, the solidarity of the da'wa does not seem to have been affected by his death.

He was succeeded as chief da'i by a close companion, another Persian, who is also described as one of the da'is who pioneered the New Preaching in Syria. This was Abu Tahir, whose surname

70. This seems the logical sequence of events, given the details in Kalanisi, pp.57-8, and Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.591.

71. Kalanisi, p.58 has fourteen days; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.591 has twenty-four; Quatremère, p.342, follows Kamal.

72. Defrémery, p.379 reports, "selon une autre version", that he was murdered, but gives no references.

identifies him as a goldsmith, or, as some translations have it, a jeweller.⁷³

Concerning Abu Tahir's immediate activities in Aleppo, we are told virtually nothing, but it is evident that the Nizaris' reputation in the city was growing. In the same year as Janah's assassination, Aleppo's kadi Fadl Allah as-Suzaini was also assassinated. The citizens at once blamed the Nizaris, for the kadi was known to have spoken out against them, and even though he was attacked on leaving Ridwan's presence nothing was done to apprehend his assailants. That is strongly suggestive of Nizari culpability, for Abu Tahir surely inherited al-Hakim al-Munajjim's place at court. But while it is tempting to regard this as a chance insight into otherwise unrecorded assassinations and intimidation, in the absence of further evidence we must admit the possibility that a rival faction killed the kadi and that the Nizaris had nothing to do with it.⁷⁴

Outside Aleppo, considerable effort seems to have been devoted to the towns and villages of the Jazr and Jabal Summak, where the majority of indigenous Syrian Isma'ilis were to be found. We know of this activity only by the results which appear in the next few

73. Kalanisi, pp.73, 145; Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.233, 235; Sibṭ, RHC. Or., III, pp.530, 549; Abu'l-Mahasin, RHC. Or., III, p.495. Defrémery p.379 points out that some MSS. have as-Sa'igh, the goldsmith, while a few have Ibn as-Sa'igh, son of the goldsmith. The sources available to me all have Abu Tahir as-Sa'igh.

74. Kamal, cited in Defrémery, p.380; not mentioned in the Recueil version. See also Hodgson, p.90.

years, but it is reasonable to assume that activity began about this time, if not earlier. Aside from Isma'ili elements, these were areas of strong Shi'ite influence, sheltering, as we have seen, minorities such as the Druzes and Nusayris.⁷⁵ Here, where Sunnite opposition may have been feeble, the Nizaris seem to have met with a significant response. Kalanisi says that both al-Hakim al-Munajjim and Abu Tahir were supported by "a great host" of Isma'ilis from Sarmin, the Jazr, the Jabal Summak and the tribe of the Banu 'Ulain.⁷⁶ A later chronicler who uses his sources carefully offers a similar list which includes Sarmin, the Jabal Summak, Ma'arra, and "elsewhere nearby."⁷⁷

Sarmin, from being a centre of Fatimid Isma'ilism, seems to have become something of a Nizari retreat. One writer has even suggested that Sarmin may have had its own dar al-da'wa.⁷⁸ The importance of Sarmin for the Nizari campaign in the Jazr suggests that Sibṭ's Ma'arra, of the three localities bearing the name in this area, was probably Ma'arrat Misrin, which is closest of the three to Sarmin.⁷⁹

75. See above, pp.63-4.

76. Kalanisi, p.145; under A.H. 507 (1113-14) but his reference to al-Hakim extends this observation at least to 1103.

77. Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.549.

78. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.190; no references are given.

79. See the articles by E. Honigmann, "Ma'arrat Miṣrīn", and "Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān", EI, ii, pp.58-62.

Because we have no more than a strong likelihood of Nizari activity in the Jazr at this time we cannot say for certain what role, if any, Nizari elements played in the interesting events of May 1104. A combined Frankish army had suffered a disastrous defeat at Harran earlier that month,⁸⁰ and while Tancred and Bohemond hastened to secure Edessa, Ridwan saw an opportunity to recover some of the territory he had recently lost to Antioch. Curiously, he achieved this without himself entering the area.

From his camp near the Euphrates he issued orders for the inhabitants of the Jazr to rise in rebellion and drive out the depleted Frankish garrisons there. We are told that the inhabitants of Fua, Sarmin, Ma'arrat Misrin and nearby places ran to arms and actually captured a few Franks, while the remainder fled to Antioch. But these were the only towns to take direct action. The garrisons at Latmin, Kafartab, Albara and Ma'arrat al-Nu'man withdrew of their own accord.⁸¹

Ridwan had no direct control over these areas and the populace could easily have preferred the better part of valour, yet it is

80. See Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.236-8; the sources available to me vary considerably in their accounts of this engagement; see Kalanisi, pp.60-61; Anonymous Syriac Chronicle, translated Tritton and Gibb, JRAS (1933), pp.78-80; Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.221-3; Matthew of Edessa, RHC. Arm., I, pp.71-2; Albert of Aix, Liber christianae expeditionis, lx, 38-42, RHC. Occ., IV, pp.614-617; William of Tyre, X, 29-30, trans. E.A. Babcock and A.C. Krey, A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea (New York, 1943), I, pp.456-9.

81. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.592-3; Hodgson, p.91, corrects a confusion in the Recueil translation at this point.

perhaps more than passing coincidence that those places which did respond were the very places in which the Nizaris would appear to have been gaining followings at this time.

It is also conceivable that Nizari militia formed part of the army which Ridwan led out to relieve Artah in April 1105, for Kalanisi makes special mention of the Aleppine infantry. He says it was made up mostly of the ahdath or armed bands of the city; as Ridwan's most loyal supporters, we may justifiably guess that the Nizari ahdath figured prominently here. The sources tell us that Ridwan suffered a heavy defeat when his Turkish cavalry fled; only the ahdath bands held firm, enabling Ridwan to escape, before they were annihilated by the superior weight of the Frankish cavalry.⁸²

This defeat led to the reoccupation by Tancred of the territories Ridwan had temporarily recovered in the Jazr. Some of the towns which had driven out their Frankish garrisons were treated rather harshly, parts of their defences being dismantled and their inhabitants being forcibly expelled.⁸³ Foremost of these was Sarmin. Ibn al-Athir says that its "zealously Shi'ite" inhabitants dispersed to Aleppo and other places, and that the kadi of the town went down to Afamiya to seek shelter with Khalaf ibn Mula'ib.⁸⁴

82. Kalanisi, pp.69-70; Kamal, RHC. Or., p.593; Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.227-9 says that 3000 of Ridwan's 7000 infantry were volunteers; Albert of Aix, IX, 47, RHC. Occ., IV, pp.620-621; William of Tyre, XI, 2, trans. Babcock and Krey, I, pp.463-4.

83. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.594; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.242.

84. Athir, RHC. Or., III, p.233.

Here we have a rare indication of the extent of Nizari success outside Aleppo, because the kadi of Sarmin, one Abu'l-Fath, is positively identified in another source as a Nizari da'i.⁸⁵

Sarmin in our period was much more than a mere village, and for the local Nizari da'i to be appointed its kadi was a remarkable achievement for the da'wa. Theoretically charged with deliberation and judgement in all civil disputes, for which he was first resort, the kadi of a Muslim community was not merely a stipendiary magistrate. He occupied a key position, together with the ra'is, in what we would term the local government, advising and supervising. Accordingly, he was usually a leading citizen, an important and respected notable with some following in the community.⁸⁶

Abu'l-Fath's elevation to the magistracy could have had any one of a number of causes. If one thinks that the Nizaris freely used intimidation to gain their ends, then it might appear as if they had terrorized the citizens to accept their leader. A more charitable and in fact more likely explanation is simply that the Nizaris had succeeded in winning over a majority of the Isma'ilis and Shi'ites

85. Kalanisi, p.73. This is probably what prompted Cahen, (Syrie du Nord, p.190) to say that the Nizaris had a dar al-da'wa at Sarmin.

86. Cahen, "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du Moyen Âge", Arabica, V (1958), pp.231-2. On the kadi's duties see also L. Gardet, La Cité Musulmane (Paris, 1961), pp.136-9, and R. Levy, The Social Structure of Islam, second edition, (Cambridge, 1957), pp.338-347.

in the town, and were able to outweigh those who had traditionally controlled the office.

No information concerning Abu'l-Fath's activities in Sarmin has yet come to light.

Though the fortunes of the da'wa appear to have been rising fairly steadily up to this point, the reoccupation of the Jazr by the troops of Antioch and the expulsion of the populace of Sarmin would have seriously interrupted the Nizari campaign outside Aleppo. If we admit the possibility that Nizari militia were present at Artah in 1105, we must also count this as the da'wa's first serious loss of manpower, for as we have seen, the infantry there were all slaughtered. Such reverses would have demonstrated yet more clearly what must have been obvious to the Nizari leadership all along; that Ridwan was a valuable ally inside Aleppo, but he was simply not powerful enough to safeguard Nizari gains outside the city.

The initial concentration of the da'wa at Aleppo should not obscure the likelihood that its leaders had the same ultimate goals in mind as the parent da'wa in Persia, namely the seizure of key fortresses to serve as propaganda centres for their campaign and refuges in time of disturbance or Saljuk retaliation.

With this in mind, Abu'l-Fath's choice of Afamiya as a place of refuge may have been calculated and not merely fortuitous. Afamiya was well-known for the Shi'ite predominance in its mixed population of Muslims and Maronite Christians, and its ruler had obtained his appointment originally from the Fatimid government,

but Afamiya was also a strategically well-placed, strongly-fortified hill-top town, with a compact citadel.⁸⁷ The Franks considered Khalaf to be a friendly and generous neighbour, as well as very powerful.⁸⁸

Khalaf received Abu'l-Fath warmly and we are told that he took him into his personal retinue, allotting him an allowance as if he were one of his officers. Secure in Khalaf's confidence, Abu'l-Fath soon got in touch with Abu Tahir at Aleppo, and also perhaps with remaining Nizari da'is in the Jazr. Their letters doubtless discussed ways and means of securing Afamiya for the da'wa. However, Khalaf's sons found out about Abu'l-Fath's correspondence, and warned their father that it might be unwise to confide in the kadi. We are told that Abu'l-Fath met this challenge boldly; Kur'an in hand, he successfully convinced Khalaf of his innocence and good intentions.⁸⁹

It was now evident that the plans for seizing Afamiya needed to be executed without further delay. Abu'l-Fath resumed his correspondence with Abu Tahir and asked for Ridwan to provide some of the Nizari refugees from Sarmin with captured Frankish horses and equipment. They were then to appear at Afamiya and present these to Khalaf as spoils from a raid. Khalaf with his usual generosity

87. Also known as Qal'at al-Mudiq; see H.A.R. Gibb, article "Afāmiya", EI2, i, p.215, and Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.163, 243.

88. Albert of Aix, X, 17, RHC. Occ., IV, p.639.

89. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.233; Albert of Aix, X, 17, RHC. Occ., IV, p.639.

would probably extend hospitality to them, and this would provide Abu'l-Fath with the necessary manpower to stage a coup.

The ruse worked exactly according to plan. The party of Sarminese Nizaris was welcomed by Khalaf, and installed in a house adjoining the citadel.⁹⁰ There is some disagreement as to what happened next. Athir says that when darkness had fallen and the guards were asleep, Abu'l-Fath let down ropes to enable the Nizaris to climb up into the citadel; other sources say a hole was made in the wall.⁹¹ For once, Athir's version sounds more likely if the Nizaris wanted to avoid unnecessary delay.

Once inside the citadel, the Nizaris worked fast. They slaughtered the garrison where they slept, and Abu'l-Fath led a party to Khalaf's chambers, where his family and relatives were likewise slaughtered. Khalaf was found in bed with his wife; he awoke and begged for mercy, but Abu'l-Fath himself stabbed him to death. The Nizaris then raised their battle cry on the tower of the citadel and proclaimed their allegiance to Ridwan of Aleppo. Khalaf's sons and officers rushed in from the walls but could not dislodge the Nizaris. One of Khalaf's sons then fled to Shaizar, where he was given refuge on account of his friendship with a son

90. Athir RHC. Or., I, p.234 says the party numbered 300; Kamal, in the Bughyat (extract translated in Lewis, Assassins, p.102) by contrast puts their number at only six, and says that they claimed to have killed a Frankish knight and seized his animals and equipment.

91. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.234; Kalanisi, p.73; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.594; Sibt, RHC. Or., III, p.530.

of the Banu Munkidh. News of this affair at Afamiya reached Damascus on 3 February 1106.⁹²

The Nizaris had succeeded in seizing their first fortress in Syria. Their tenure, however, was precarious in the extreme, for they held only the citadel and not the town or its walls. The citizens were dismayed at the prospect of Ridwan's tutelage, and Abu'l-Fath was nervous of what the Christians in the town might do. Sure enough, while Abu'l-Fath sent appeals for aid to Aleppo, the Christian and Armenian citizens sent to Tancred at Antioch.⁹³

Abu Tahir was the first to arrive. Athir has a curious story that Abu'l-Fath refused him entry until he agreed to submit to his authority. If there is any truth in this, it could indicate that Abu'l-Fath wanted the da'wa to free itself from dependence on Ridwan. Perhaps he had repented proclaiming Ridwan's name from the battlements, because he saw Afamiya as a convenient replacement for Sarmin. Whatever our speculations on this intriguing item, we should remember that Abu'l-Fath did not have possession of the town or outer walls, and the citizens would naturally refuse entry to any Nizari reinforcements from Aleppo.⁹⁴ Abu Tahir retired and set up camp nearby to await developments.

92. Kalanisi, pp.72-3; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.594; Sibṭ, RHC. Or., III, p.530; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.234; Abu'l-Mahasin, RHC. Or., III, p.495; Ibn Muyassar, RHC. Or., III, p.466. See also Quatremère, p.342; Defrémery, pp.382-4; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.243; and E. Rey, "Résumé chronologique de l'histoire des princes d'Antioch", ROI, IV (1896), pp.336-7.

93. Albert of Aix, X, 17-18, RHC. Occ., IV, p.640.

94. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.235; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.594.

Developments soon occurred; Tancred of Antioch arrived with a large army, and with him as a prisoner was Abu'l-Fath's brother, doubtless captured at Sarmin the year before.⁹⁵ Whether for his brother's sake or not, we are told that Abu'l-Fath now negotiated with the citizens, and conciliated them with bribes and flattery.⁹⁶ But despite his large army, Tancred seems to have been unwilling to commence a full-scale siege, and after imposing tribute on the town, he withdrew.⁹⁷

The situation at Afamiya apparently remained unchanged until after Easter (25 March, 1106) when Tancred returned, well-equipped for a siege. After three fruitless weeks he was called away to relieve his garrison at Lattakiah, which was blockaded by Byzantine forces.⁹⁸ Tancred might indeed have lost interest in Afamiya were it not for Khalaf's two sons, the one who had fled to Shaizar and another who had been in Damascus at the time of the Nizari coup. They pressed Tancred to resume the siege, promising him aid, and advising that they doubted if there would be more than a month's provisions left within the town.⁹⁹

Accordingly, Tancred resumed the siege, his forces swelled

95. Kalanisi, p.73.

96. Albert of Aix, X, 19, RHC. Occ., IV, p.640.

97. Kalanisi, p.73.

98. Albert, X, 19-20, RHC. Occ. IV, p.640; which has Laodicea, in error; see also Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.243-4.

99. Kalanisi, p.74; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.235; Albert of Aix, X, 21, RHC. Occ., IV, p.641.

by the hundred Turkish and Arab troops promised by Khalaf's sons. This time, the siege was pressed with great vigour; we are told that the mangonels hurled stones unceasingly, and that a great ditch was dug which completely encircled the town.¹⁰⁰ The blockade was maintained until the town's food supplies were exhausted. Tancred's troops may also have wearied because when the defenders offered terms Tancred promptly accepted them. Afamiya surrendered on 14 September, 1106, on condition that its inhabitants be spared.¹⁰¹

Abu Tahir and the Nizaris from Aleppo were also captured, but whether they had joined Abu'l-Fath in the citadel or were still encamped a short distance away, we do not know.

Our sources are not in agreement over the fate of the Nizaris. In one place, Ibn al-Athir says that both Abu'l-Fath and Abu Tahir were captured and killed, but notes that others give the date of Abu Tahir's death as A.H. 507 (1113-14).¹⁰² Our sole Latin source, which has an unusually detailed account of events at Afamiya, says that Tancred agreed to spare Botherus (Abu'l-Fath) taking him and his companions captive to Antioch, but that the rest were tortured by Khalaf's sons.¹⁰³ However, most of the Muslim sources state that it was Abu'l-Fath who was put to death by torture, Abu Tahir and his companions being taken prisoner to Antioch where they soon

100. Albert of Aix, X, 22, RHC. Occ., IV, p.641.

101. Kalanisi, p.74; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.594.

102. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.235.

103. Albert of Aix, X, 23-4; RHC. Occ., IV, p.642.

ransomed themselves and returned to Aleppo.¹⁰⁴ This seems the most likely solution; it would be easy for our Latin chronicler to confuse the two Nizari leaders, and Athir is clearly uneasy about Abu Tahir's fate, for he offers Kalanisi's explanation in a later entry.¹⁰⁵ It would appear, therefore, that Abu'l-Fath and the Nizaris from the Jazr were virtually destroyed, while Abu Tahir and the Aleppine Nizaris returned to Ridwan more or less intact. Ridwan was no doubt pleased at Abu Tahir's safe return, for he is described in this year as one of the chief notables of Ridwan's court.¹⁰⁶

The episode at Afamiya is most instructive of the difficulties facing the Nizaris in Syria. The very conditions of intermittent warfare and social dislocation which seemed to enhance the prospect of conversions also contained serious disadvantages. In Persia the Nizaris had seized castles in areas remote from the main campaigns of the Saljuk amirs. But in Syria the Nizaris found their best response in precisely that border territory west and south of Aleppo across which rolled the conflict between crusaders and Muslims. In Persia, there was rarely anybody else actively competing for the control of remote mountain fortresses; in Syria, there was fierce and constant competition for key strongholds between forces far more numerous and better equipped than the Nizaris.

The Syrian da'wa had shown that it had sufficient manpower and

104. Kalanisi, p.74; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.595.

105. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.291.

106. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.233.

ingenuity to seize castles, but once in possession it apparently could not withstand the combined threat of the Franks on one hand and the indifference or hostility of Syrian Muslims on the other. Until the da'wa was very much stronger, or could find castles not directly threatened by the Franks, the policy of castle-seizure would be held in abeyance. This seems the likeliest explanation for the Syrian da'wa's continued concentration on Aleppo, and its diligent cultivation of the alliance with Ridwan. His protection was still the best available means for the da'wa to expand and consolidate its strength, and for the moment Ridwan could not afford to dispense with Nizari support.¹⁰⁷

107. H.A.R. Gibb, "Zengi and the fall of Edessa", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.449, observes that the local strength of Aleppo in Ridwan's reign lay precisely in its alliance with the "Assassins".

CHAPTER IV

ALEPPO 1106-1114

The failure at Afamiya may have been a more serious blow to the Syrian da^cwa than it perhaps appears to us, for very little is heard of Nizari activity in the years immediately following 1106. Our earliest piece of information refers to 1107 and is in fact one of those retrospective items occasionally included by the chroniclers in their accounts of much later events. This item tells us that a new da^ci, another Persian, was sent to Syria from Alamut in 1107 or shortly afterwards. This was Abu Muhammad, who soon became one of the leading da^cis in Syria and actually succeeded to the leadership of the da^cwa some thirty years later. His chosen area of operations was the Jabal Summak, of which we have already made mention.¹ Whether immediately or over the next few years, he is said to have begun acquiring forts from the Nusayris in this area.² It is scarcely surprising that no mention of this is made in the major chronicles. The area was much more heavily populated then than it is today,³ and the forts Abu Muhammad acquired were probably little more than refuge towers of khans (fortified travellers' resting places).

1. See above, pp. 62-65; 90-91.

2. Dhahabi, Ta'rikh al-Islam, cited in Defremery, pp.399-400; see also Hodgson, p.93.

3. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.163, testifies to the remains of innumerable small villages, and says the area was "bien plus vert" in the time of the Crusaders.

In Aleppo, the Nizari alliance with Ridwan presumably continued, there being nothing to suggest that it would have stopped. Ridwan's military weakness had seen no significant amelioration, and in addition to the threat from Antioch he now faced complications to the east, mostly created by the Turkish adventurer Jawali Saqawa. Jawali had occupied Mosul in 1107 and governed it badly before being driven out, to Qal'at Ja'bar on the Euphrates. He had in his possession a valuable Frankish prisoner, Baldwin of le Bourg, whom he now ransomed on generous terms in order to cultivate a possible alliance.

Jawali in combination with the Franks of Edessa would be a serious threat to Aleppo, and Ridwan's fears seemed realized in September 1108 when Jawali attacked Balis, just a few miles upstream and across the Euphrates from Qal'at Ja'bar, and slaughtered Ridwan's garrison. Ridwan was forced to ask for help from his arch-enemy, Tancred of Antioch, which had the bizarre result that in the following month a battle was fought near Manbij between the forces of Ridwan and Tancred from the west and Jawali, Baldwin of le Bourg, and Joscelin. Though Ridwan's contribution was very small, Tancred virtually swept the eastern allies from the field, losing nearly all his infantry and some of his cavalry in the process.⁴ Ridwan recovered Balis, but he was now little more than Tancred's client,

4. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.595; Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.263-267; Matthew of Edessa, RHC. Arm., I, pp.86-7; Anonymous Syriac Chronicle, trans. Tritton and Gibb, JRAS (1933), pp.81-82; Bar Hebraeus, The Chronography, trans. E.A.W. Budge (Oxford, 1932), pp.241-3; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.247-250.

paying regular tribute to keep the troops of Antioch at bay. Fortunately for Aleppo, Tancred was soon involved in campaigns in the south, against Shaizar.

More than ever, Ridwan's survival depended on how delicately he could balance supporters against adversaries. His anxiety not to alienate his major potential source of support, his Saljuk cousins further east, was made evident in 1108. His patronage of the Nizaris at Aleppo had not gone unnoticed by other Saljuk amirs, and the sources speak of Ridwan being deaf to their entreaties,⁵ so it is likely that he was repeatedly reminded of his cousins' disapproval. This criticism took a more serious turn in 1108 when Ridwan heard that accusations against him were being made before the Sultan.

Ridwan's response is most interesting. He did not cast off the Nizaris altogether, but as a gesture he had a few of them arrested and executed for known crimes and expelled from the city one Abu'l-Ganim, who is variously described as a brother or nephew to the unfortunate Abu'l-Fath executed by Tancred at Afamiya. Satisfied with this display, which was doubtless accompanied by secret reassurances to the Nizari leaders, Ridwan returned to his old policy of alliance, and once again turned a deaf ear to the remonstrances of other Muslim princes.⁶

5. The earliest of these references being Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.590.

6. Quatremère, p.342, and Defrémery, pp.385-6; no references are given, but this episode may have come from Ibn abi-Tayy through Ibn al-Furat, whom Quatremère uses intensively.

The next two years of the da'wa's existence are completely blank, but Abu Muhammad's work in the Jabal Summak may have been in part responsible for a single laconic entry, confirmed in no other source, to the effect that Tancred captured the fortress-town of Kafarlata from the "Isma'ilis" in A.H. 504 (20 July 1110 to 9 July 1111).⁷ Kafarlata is only a few miles south west of Sarmin, so we may reasonably expect Nizari da'is to have been active there even before Abu Muhammad. That no source notices the Nizari acquisition of this important stronghold could indicate that it was held only briefly before Tancred recaptured it, and this may be inferred from the movements of Tancred and Ridwan in 1110. The new ruler of Mosul, Sharaf al-Dawlah Mawdud, besieged Edessa in the early summer, and Tancred was involved in the relief of the city in July. He was also involved in the disastrous Frankish retreat across the Euphrates which ended this campaign. As in 1104, Ridwan hoped that Tancred was sufficiently preoccupied to enable him to recover territories in the Jazr, and Kafarlata was probably one of the fortresses he recovered at this time. If, as seems likely, Nizari militia assisted him in this, they may have been assigned to Kafarlata as Ridwan's garrison.

Tancred had not been immobilized, however, and he soon retaliated. Beginning with the siege of Atharib in December 1110, he forced Ridwan to surrender all his recent gains in the Jazr, before moving south to threaten and extract tribute from Shaizar and

7. Ibn al-Furat, cited in Quatremère, p.342, and Defrémery, p.387; see also Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.243.

Hims. Kafarlata would most likely have been taken from the "Isma^cilis" at this time.⁸

Ridwan was once again left with little more than the city of Aleppo itself, and Kamal tells us that he sold off some sixty lots of property in an attempt to conciliate the murmuring populace.⁹ That the Nizaris were still prominent in Ridwan's service is made abundantly clear in the events of the following year.

The able and energetic ruler of Mosul, the amir Mawdud, was ordered by the Sultan to resume holy war against the Franks, and he invaded Edessene territory and besieged Turbessel in July, 1111. Some part of the motivation behind this second campaign may be attributable to disturbances at Baghdad fomented by a party of Aleppine merchants and Sufis at the start of that year.¹⁰ Though their noisy demands for holy war against the Franks represented popular feeling in Aleppo, Ridwan himself had also formally requested aid from Mawdud against the Franks.

By the time Mawdud appeared before the city in August 1111, however, Ridwan had changed his mind. Perhaps he realized he would

8. Kalanisi, pp.101-106; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.596-8; other accounts are somewhat muddled; Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.281, 287; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.540; William of Tyre, XI, 7, trans. Babcock and Krey, I, pp.472-4, (under 1108).

9. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.598.

10. Kalanisi, p.111-112; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.261; it is an indication of the importance of the Shi^cite element in Aleppo that this important mission to ask for aid against the Franks was led by a sharif of the Banu'l-Khashshab.

bear the brunt of Tancred's vengeance once Mawdud had returned to Mosul, or perhaps his Nizari friends had prevailed on him, fearing Aleppo's subjection to Sunnite influences. Whatever his reason, Ridwan refused Mawdud and his army entry to the city.

He shut himself in the citadel, and took hostages from the townsfolk to neutralize the city notables, who were furious at this insult to Mawdud. As an added safeguard we are told that Ridwan organized the Nizari ahdath together with his Turks to man the walls and to keep the townspeople away from the citadel.¹¹ Kamal adds that he was so nervous he refused to admit any citizens to his presence, but kept the Nizaris about him at all times. It has been suggested that Ridwan feared a conjunction between the Sunnites and Twelver Shi'ites of Aleppo and Mawdud's army, which his Turks and the Nizaris would be incapable of containing. The Banu'l-Khashashab had in fact been negotiating with one of Mawdud's amirs, the Kurd Ahmad-Yal, to oust Ridwan and hand Aleppo over to Mawdud.¹²

Mawdud blockaded the city for seventeen days, and devastated the surrounding countryside, but then moved south, to encamp before Shaizar on 15 September, 1111.¹³

Ridwan's action not only convinced Mawdud of his perfidy; it

11. Kalanisi, pp.114-115.

12. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.261-2.

13. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.600; Albert of Aix, XI, 38, RHC. Occ., IV, p.681; Defrémery, p.385; see also the article by H.S. Fink, "Mawdud I, Precursor of Saladin," The Muslim World, XLIII (1953), pp.18-27, for a useful outline of Mawdud's successive campaigns in Syria.

induced the atabeg and ruler of Damascus, Zahir al-Din Tughtakin, to cultivate Mawdud's friendship; Ridwan had isolated himself even further. He vainly tried to sow dissension between Tughtakin and the eastern army, and there is mention of a plot with one of the amirs to have Tughtakin assassinated.¹⁴ But a firm friendship between Mawdud and Tughtakin was taking root, and continued even after Mawdud's return to Mosul, probably in October 1111.¹⁵ Tancred now resumed raids against Aleppine territory, and Ridwan's weakness and isolation were such that he was again forced to humble himself and ask for protection from his southern rival, Tughtakin.¹⁶

Ridwan's unpopularity with his subjects in Aleppo was raised to an unprecedented peak by these events, and an incident in the following year, A.H. 505 (1111-12) provided the occasion for an outburst of pent-up resentment against both Ridwan and his favoured Nizaris. In September or October 1111 there arrived in Aleppo one Abu Harb Isa ibn Zaid, a rich jurisconsul from Transoxiana, with a camel-train of five hundred, laden with merchandise for trade. This man was a declared enemy of the Isma'ilis, and gave large sums to their enemies. He had been followed from Khurasan by a Nizari called Ahmad ibn Nasr, a Persian from Rayy, whose brother had been killed by Abu Harb's men. At Aleppo, Ahmad sought out Abu Tahir, who soon persuaded Ridwan that Abu Harb could be eliminated with no small

14. Kalanisi, p.117.

15. Kalanisi, p.119.

16. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.601-602.

profit for Ridwan's exchequer. Ridwan accordingly contributed some of his Turks and Abu Tahir gave Ahmad some of the Nizari militia so that he could raid and sack Abu Harb's camp. As the Nizari troop approached, however, Ahmad was recognized, and in a sharp engagement the Nizaris were all killed. Abu Harb complained bitterly to Ridwan, who ignored him, so the citizens assured Abu Harb that they would wreak vengeance for him. One of the armed bands later fell upon a group of young Nizaris and slaughtered them all. Ridwan would neither condemn nor condone this action, so Abu Harb wrote letters of protest to Tughtakin and other Muslim princes. In reply to their remonstrances, Ridwan feebly protested his innocence of any complicity. The episode destroyed any remaining shreds of local confidence in Ridwan, and also demonstrated that the Nizaris were only as powerful as Ridwan's support allowed. From this time on, we are told, the citizens had no fear of attacking solitary Nizaris.¹⁷

Similar anti-Nizari resentment seems to have found expression in the Jazr at this time. We are told that Twelver Shi'ites were involved in disturbances with some Nizaris at Ma'arrat Misrin in A.H. 505 (1111-1112).¹⁸ No further details are given. We cannot decide what caused them or indeed what form the disturbances took, but it is possible that for once the Nizari preaching unexpectedly

17. Ibn al-Furat, cited in Quatremère, pp.342-3, and Deffrémery, p.387-8; see also Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.268.

18. Ibn al-Furat, cited in Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.268; cf. Hodgson, p.93.

met with determined resistance from the local populace.

At the end of the following year, Ridwan was relieved of his most dangerous adversary; Tancred of Antioch died in December, 1112.¹⁹ There is a striking pause in the activity of the Franks of Antioch under Tancred's nephew and successor Roger (1112-1119), but Aleppo continued to pay the same tribute as it had to Tancred.²⁰ Ridwan was doubtless glad of the respite, for his attention was increasingly drawn southwards, to Damascus, and eastwards, to Mawdud at Mosul.

Mawdud was the first of the Mesopotamian amirs to commit himself to regular campaigns against the crusaders in Syria and at Edessa. He invested Edessa for the third consecutive year in April, May and June of 1112, but had to withdraw with no significant gains. In May 1113, however, he entered Syria with his largest army yet, to pursue holy war against the Franks.²¹ Tughtakin met him at Salamiya in June, and together they went to besiege Tiberias beside the sea of Galilee. They defeated a relieving army from Jerusalem on 28 June, and kept Baldwin's troops marooned on a hill for more than three weeks, before retiring into the Hauran early in August.²²

19. Kalanisi, p.132 has 11 December; Matthew of Edessa, RHC. Arm., I, p.103 has 5 December; Fulcher, II, 45, RHC. Occ., III, p.425 has 12 December; see also E. Rey "Résumé chronologique de l'histoire des princes d'Antioch", ROL, IV (1896), p.340.

20. Kalanisi, p.132; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.266.

21. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.288.

22. Kalanisi, pp.134-6; Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.288-9; Sibb, RHC. Or., III, p.546; Fulcher, II, 49, RHC. Or., III, pp.425-7; William of Tyre, XI, 19, trans. Babcock and Krey, I, pp. 493-5.

Mawdud and Tughtakin had asked Ridwan for aid; in mid-August, when the Muslim army was preparing to go home, there arrived a mere one hundred men from Ridwan's askar.²³ Tughtakin was so disgusted at this empty and belated gesture that he had Ridwan's name removed from his coinage and from the invocations in the khutba, thus terminating a truce which had been established between them in October 1111.²⁴

Ridwan could ill-afford so serious a breach between Aleppo and Damascus. He was probably even more deeply disquieted when news came that Mawdud was to spend the winter at Damascus as Tughtakin's guest. This was ostensibly to await fresh orders in reply to the report Mawdud had sent back to the Sultan when his troops dispersed eastwards early in September,²⁵ but Ridwan no doubt feared that Mawdud and Tughtakin were planning retaliatory action against him, perhaps to submit Aleppo to Damascene control.

Mawdud had been at Damascus about a month when, on Friday 2 October 1113, he came in from his camp as usual to take part in the midday prayer. At the completion of the service, Tughtakin and Mawdud left the mosque, Tughtakin walking some distance ahead as a mark of respect. The courtyard of the mosque was crowded with people gathered to witness the spectacle of the amir's procession. Mawdud

23. Kalanisi, p.137.

24. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.601-602, giving 16 August for Tughtakin's action; Sibb, RHC. Or., III, p.545.

25. Kalanisi, pp.138-9.

was surrounded by a host of his Turkish and Persian bodyguards with their swords unsheathed and held aloft, so that our chronicler says they presented the appearance of a tangled thicket of intertwined spikes. As they advanced across the courtyard, a man emerged from the crowd and approached Mawdud. Nobody took any notice of him, for it was common enough to see people bless and beg alms of a ruler after the service. But this man's purpose was quite otherwise; he seized the belt of Mawdud's riding cloak and stabbed him twice below the navel. One thrust entered Mawdud's flank and the other his thigh. On the second blow, the assassin was hacked to pieces by Mawdud's bodyguards, yet Mawdud himself continued walking, and the people thought he had escaped injury. He got as far as the north gate of the courtyard before he collapsed. He was carried directly to Tughtakin's residence, where a surgeon sewed up his wounds, but he died about mid-afternoon. The assassin's head had been cut off and displayed but nobody recognized him. His body was then burned.²⁶

It is to be noticed that Kalanisi makes no mention of instigation. Many people immediately blamed the Nizaris, and most of the chroniclers share this view.²⁷ Ibn al-Athir explains the

26. Kalanisi, pp.140-1; this vivid and detailed account suggests that Kalanisi may have been an eyewitness to the assassination; we may at least be sure that he interviewed eyewitnesses, such was his diligence as a historian.

27. Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.289-290; II, pp.35-6; Anonymous Syriac Chronicle, trans. Tritton and Gibb, JRAS (1933), p.85; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.11; Abu'l-Mahasin, RHC. Or., III, p.497; Bar Hebraeus, trans. Budge, (Oxford, 1932), p.245.

Nizari motivation in terms of fear, and it is likely that they saw Mawdud as a threat to their favoured position under Ridwan and as a symbol of Saljuk-Sunnite revival in Syria. But Athir also says that others blamed Tughtakin. This explanation attracted a considerable following. Matthew of Edessa preserves the most detailed version, which says that Mawdud was plotting to depose Tughtakin and seize Damascus for himself, but that Tughtakin gave a condemned Persian prisoner five hundred gold pieces to murder the amir, promising him further riches and honour if he succeeded.²⁸ Athir adds that Tughtakin and Mawdud left the mosque hand in hand.²⁹

Though this was obviously the explanation which gained widest credence at Mosul and Baghdad, where there were many anxious to discredit Tughtakin, it fails to stand up against abundant contemporary testimonies to the friendship existing between Mawdud and Tughtakin,³⁰ and Tughtakin's evident grief and distress at Mawdud's death.³¹

Sibt ibn al-Jawzi categorically denies that Tughtakin was in any way implicated, stressing his friendship with Mawdud and the public mourning he conducted for some time afterwards.³² Tughtakin could

28. Matthew of Edessa, RHC. Arm., I, pp.107-108; William of Tyre follows this explanation as well; X, 20, and XI, 23, trans. Babcock and Krey, I, pp.495-6, 501.

29. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.290, ignoring Kalanisi's clear account.

30. Kalanisi, pp.117, 119, 134, 139; see also Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.601 and Sibt, RHC. Or., III, p.543.

31. Kalanisi, p.141.

32. RHC. Or., III, p.551.

have feigned mourning, of course, but it is difficult to see how any amount of riches and promised honours could conceal from his Persian prisoner, if there was one, that this would inevitably be a suicide mission.

Though we cannot dogmatically assert that the Nizaris killed Mawdud, circumstances strongly suggest that they were responsible, and this in turn implicates Ridwan. Both had equally strong independent motives for Mawdud's elimination, largely derived from fear of Mawdud's greater power and his embodiment of Saljuk militancy and Sunnite dominance; he was, after all, the Sultan's brother. Furthermore, Mawdud's assassination has all the elements of the classic Nizari operation; a notable Saljuk victim, a very public murder demanding great nerve and split-second timing, with the full realization of a swift and horrible death to follow, and a plausible scapegoat at hand in the victim's host. It is not unlikely that the Nizaris themselves helped spread the rumours blaming Tughtakin, as one of their "cover-stories".³³ Assassinations among the amirs were usually, by contrast, furtive closed-door affairs, and if Tughtakin had wanted to be rid of Mawdud for any reason he would surely have taken care to equip himself with an effective alibi.

If, then, we may credit the Nizaris with Mawdud's death, this was by some distance the greatest exploit to date of the Syrian da'wa. The consequences of his death reverberated far beyond

33. See Lewis, "The Sources for the History of the Syrian Assassins", Speculum XXVII (1952), p.489.

Damascus, causing great perturbation at Baghdad and Mosul. The Sultan Muhammad conceived a deep suspicion of the Syrian amirs, especially Tughtakin, and there were no further Saljuk-inspired expeditions against the crusaders for some years to come. Mawdud's territories in Mesopotamia were given to Aksunkur Il-Bursuki, who was encouraged to take as his overlord the able young amir Zanki,³⁴ with incalculable consequences for northern Syria in future decades. As for Tughtakin, he had lost an ally who had helped him inflict serious reverses on the kingdom of Jerusalem; he was now forced to return to his former policy of truces with the Franks.

At Aleppo, Ridwan was overjoyed to hear of Mawdud's death, and though this is no proof of his or the Nizaris' complicity, we may expect him to have been in an expansive mood for a time. The Nizaris seem to have capitalized on his good humour, for we are told that towards the end of 1113 they asked for and were given the little fortress of Qal'at ash-Sharif. This was more of a fort than a citadel, situated just outside the city walls of Aleppo, to the south, and separated from the walls by a ditch and a rampart. It had been built by one of the leaders (sharif) of the ahdath in 1085, when faction strife within the city became too dangerous for him to remain there.³⁵

We are not told who made the request on behalf of the Nizaris,

34. Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.551.

35. Ibn ash-Shihnah, Ad-durr al-muntakhab fi ta'rikh mamlakat Halab, trans. Sauvaget, Les Perles Choiesies (Beirut, 1933), pp.26-7; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.268.

but it might not have been Abu Tahir, the recognized chief da'ci. According to Kamal al-Din, the Nizari leader in Aleppo at this time was his son, another Abu'l-Fath.³⁶ Whether Abu Tahir was elsewhere visiting followings in rural areas or whether his son had seized the leadership, we cannot so much as guess, but it is interesting that mention is made of another leader who arrived in Aleppo in 1113 and to whom the Nizaris rallied. This is the Turk, Husam al-Din ibn Dimlaj, the commander of the Nizari ahdath or militia.³⁷ Because we are unaccustomed to the luxury of such additional details from the usually very brief references to Nizari activity in the chronicles, it would be rash to interpret this as evidence of an intestine struggle for the leadership of the da'wa. Much more plausible is the consideration that the Nizari ahdath had so much come to represent Nizari power in Aleppo in recent years that its commander was perhaps regarded by the uninitiated as the Nizaris' leader more than the senior da'ci himself.

The year which saw a peak of success for the da'wa in the assassination of Mawdud finally drew to an end on a note of uncertainty and foreboding. Early in December 1113 Ridwan died, overcome by various chronic illnesses, and the government of Aleppo passed to his sixteen year-old son, Alp Arslan.³⁸ This unstable youth at once

36. Cited in Quatremère, p.343, and Defrémery, p.393.

37. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.268, apparently following Ibn al-Furat.

38. Kalanisi, p.144, and Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.602, both give 10 December; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.290; Sibṭ, RHC. Or., III, p.548.

arrested many of his father's principal officers and seized the property of others. In a grim repetition of his father's action at the start of his rule, Alp saw fit to have his two younger brothers murdered. He chose as his chief adviser one of Ridwan's eunuchs, Lu'lu' al-Yaya, who quietly began to gather power into his own hands.³⁹

Obviously, a serious problem facing the new government was what to do with Ridwan's chief allies, the Nizaris. Several chroniclers remark on the size and strength of their following in Aleppo at this time, Kalanisi stating that they were feared because of their numbers and their corporate strength, which enabled them to protect each other. Kamal says that they gathered round the commander of their ahdath, Husam al-Din ibn Dimlaj, after Ridwan's death. Now that Ridwan's patronage had ended, the ahdath was their sole protection against the city factions.⁴⁰

It seems likely that Alp Arslan initially maintained a show of friendship and support for the Nizaris, because at this time Husam al-Din ibn Dimlaj is reported to have sent one of his Persian lieutenants, the da'i Ibrahim al-'Ajami, to take possession of al-Kulaia, a small fort at the gates of Balis.⁴¹ We cannot be sure if

39. Kalanisi, p.144; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.603.

40. Kalanisi, p.145; Kamal RHC. Or., III, p.603, and from the Bughyat, RHC. Or., III, p.730; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.12.

41. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.603; Quatremère, p.344; Defrémery, p.393; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.268.

this was Alp's gift or an arrangement made by Ridwan before his death, but this little fortress was strategically well-placed, being on the main road between Aleppo and Baghdad.⁴²

Aleppo's new ruler was shortly to be reminded, however, of his proper duty. The Sultan Muhammad, when he heard that the Nizaris had occupied al-Kulaia sent a letter to Alp Arslan which Kamal quotes as saying, "Your father never listened to my orders concerning the Batinis, but you, my son, I would like to think will exterminate them."⁴³

With this encouragement, the kadi Abu'l-Hasan ibn Khashshab and the ra'is, Sa'id ibn Badi', who was also the police-chief (sahib al-shurta) and commander of the Sunnite ahdath,⁴⁴ made representations to Alp Arslan, complaining of the excesses of the Nizaris and demanding that their dar al-da'wa be closed and the city cleared of them.⁴⁵ These two notables overcame Alp's reluctance sufficiently to obtain his consent to the arrest of the Nizari leaders. They treated this virtually as a carte blanche.

Ibn Badi' pursued his task with delighted zeal, arresting some two hundred prominent adherents of the sect, not just the leaders;

42. R. Dussaud, Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale (Paris, 1927), p.453, cited in R. Grousset, Histoire des Croisades et du Royaume Franque de Jérusalem (Paris, 1934-6), I, p.479.

43. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.603.

44. See Cahen, "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du Moyen Âge," Arabica, V (1958), p.242.

45. Sibti ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.549.

Abu Tahir, his son Abu'l-Fath, the da'i Isma'il, and the brother of al-Hakim al-Munajjim are named among those summarily executed. The government's intentions were no longer in doubt, and many Nizaris apparently began to flee the city. This mass exodus seems to have prompted Ibn Badi' to give his ahdath and the citizens of Aleppo the opportunity they had long awaited; orders were given that any Nizari found in the streets could be slaughtered. The chroniclers report that about three hundred Nizari men, women and children died in the outburst of popular hatred which followed.⁴⁶

Even if the chroniclers are not exaggerating, as they often do with numbers, this is a surprisingly small total compared with those arrested, suggesting perhaps that the bulk of the Nizaris had managed to escape. Certainly, not all the prominent members of the sect were arrested; Husam al-Din ibn Dimlaj succeeded in escaping when Abu'l-Hasan ibn Khashshab's men stormed Qal'at ash-Sharif.⁴⁷ Husam al-Din fled to Rakka where he died not long after.⁴⁸ One of Abu Tahir's pupils, a freedman named Shahdi, also escaped arrest, for he turns up some years later as a prominent Nizari in Damascus.⁴⁹ Abu'l-Fath was caught and killed at the eastern gate

46. Kalanisi, p.145; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.603-4; Ibn Asakir, quoted in Kamal's *Bughyat*, RHC. Or., III, pp.729-730; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, pp.549-550; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.291; Ibn al-Furat, cited in Sauvaget, *Alep* (Paris, 1941), p.98, and Quatremère, p.344, and Defrémery, pp.394-5.

47. Ibn ash-Shihnah, trans. Sauvaget *Les Perles Choiesies*, p.27.

48. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.604.

49. Kalanisi, p.193.

of the city, which suggests that he was attempting to flee in the same direction as Husam al-Din ibn Dimlaj.⁵⁰ Even more remarkable is the treatment accorded those actually arrested. We could reasonably expect them all to have been slaughtered, and indeed some were tortured and thrown from the top of the citadel, but we are told that others were interceded for and set free, while others merely had their goods confiscated and were banished from the city.⁵¹

Thus it seems likely that a large remnant of the da'wa's achievement at Aleppo was preserved intact. The survivors, Kalanisi tells us, dispersed abroad, some even seeking refuge in Frankish territory.⁵² This is perhaps not as impressive as it may sound, for the nearest most logical place for the survivors to seek shelter would be with their brethren in the towns and villages of the Jazr, which was then under the control of the Franks of Antioch.⁵³

The Sunnites of Aleppo made great capital out of the Nizaris' discomfiture; the heads of the slain were paraded through the streets and that of Abu'l-Fath was sent through all the neighbouring villages as evidence that the Nizaris had been expelled.⁵⁴

50. Quatremère, p.344, presumably following Ibn al-Furat.

51. Kalanisi, p.145; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.604.

52. Kalanisi, pp.145-6.

53. It is easily overlooked that intercourse between Muslim and Crusader territories was perfectly normal, even while campaigns were in progress. Some excellent examples of this are available in the observations of the Spanish pilgrim Ibn Jubayr later in the century; see the English translation by R.J.C. Broadhurst, The Travels of Ibn Jubayr (London, 1952), pp.300-301, 313, 316-7.

54. Ibn ash-Shihnah, trans. J. Sauvaget, Les Perles Choiesies, p.27, and Quatremère, p.344.

No source assigns a definite date to these events, but in view of Alp's initial prevarication and his visit to Damascus soon afterwards, the Nizari débâcle probably occurred in January or early February 1114.⁵⁵

An immediate and significant consequence of the Nizari downfall was the end of the estrangement between Aleppo and Damascus. Alp Arslan now visited Damascus, was received with honour, and accompanied back to Aleppo by Tughtakin, who stayed until the middle of March 1114.⁵⁶ On his advice, Alp arrested more of Ridwan's former officers. Most striking of all, the power of the ra'is Sa'id ibn Badi' was curtailed as abruptly as he had curtailed that of the Nizaris; he was arrested and imprisoned, and his properties were confiscated. He tried to commit suicide while in prison, and was finally allowed to go into voluntary exile for a time at Qal'at Ja'bar.⁵⁷ Ironically, the Nizari downfall benefitted the moderate Shi'ites even more than the Sunnites. Twelvers were again given access to the main mosque, and certain great families, notably the Banu'l-Jarada, could again profess their Shi'ism openly, without

55. Kalanisi, p.146, and Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.604-605, supply the relevant dates; Alp went to Damascus in Ramadan 507, which extended from 9 February to 10 March 1114 (not January - February as in the Recueil) and returned on 1 Shawwal, which was 11 March (not 28 February, as the Recueil has it).

56. Kalanisi, p.147.

57. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.605; Ibn Badi' seems to have returned to Aleppo after Alp's death, however. See below, p.137.

fear of Sunnite accusations of complicity with the Nizaris.⁵⁸

As for the Nizaris remaining outside Aleppo, their dismay did not long delay them from reasserting themselves.

When news of the arrests and executions of Aleppo reached Balis, perhaps next morning, the da'i Ibrahim and his companions abandoned the fort of al-Kulaia and fled to seek asylum at Shaizar.⁵⁹ The Banu Munkidh were justly renowned throughout Syria for their tolerance and hospitality,⁶⁰ but it is odd that Ibrahim chose a long and hazardous journey south-west when he could more easily have fled eastwards, as did Husam al-Din ibn Dimlaj. His reasons must somehow be related to the fact that barely two months after the debacle of Aleppo, the Syrian Nizaris attempted to seize Shaizar for themselves.

Ibrahim's role in this coup is not explained by any of our sources. He may have conceived the attempt himself, as Abu'l-Fath had conceived the attempt on Afamiya in 1106; once he had ingratiated himself with the Banu Munkidh, he could easily call on a force of Nizaris from nearby centres and help them seize the place. In this respect it is significant that the Nizari volunteers all came from towns in the Jazr;⁶¹ there is no hint of aid or direction from Aleppo, not that any could be expected in 1114. Thus it looks as

58. Ibn al-Furat, cited in Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.268.

59. Kamal al-Din, RHC. Or., III, p.604.

60. Gibb, The Damascus Chronicle, Introduction, p.18.

61. Kalanisi, p.147.

if the attempt on Shaizar was a hastily organized bid to compensate for the sudden loss of Aleppo as the headquarters of the da^cwa.⁶²

Yet it may not have been so hasty or unpremeditated. Ibn al-Kalanisi carefully emphasizes that "this attack had been organized a long time before".⁶³ It is not impossible that the attempt to seize a castle of their own which had failed in 1106 was about to be repeated at Shaizar by the Nizaris of the Jazr, and that Ibrahim merely hastened to join the plot and speed its execution in view of the sudden collapse of the da^cwa at Aleppo.

Sufficient time had passed for the Nizaris to have recovered their strength in the Jazr, and after Afamiya, Shaizar was the next most logical place for a Nizari coup. Its rulers were friendly and tolerant, so it would be easy to infiltrate an advance party to open the way for a larger assault, and once in Nizari hands, Shaizar would be ideal for their purposes. It occupied an important strategic position at the only safe crossing point on the Orontes between Hama and the Ghab. The upper town (al-Balad) was built on a narrow north-south ridge whose steep eastern and northern sides were encompassed by a bend of the river. On the southern and western sides, a deep man-made fosse separated the ridge from the rest of the plateau. The massive citadel with its numerous towers straddled the southern end of the ridge, connected with the barbican at the northern end by high curtain walls enclosing the upper town.

62. Ibn al-Furat, cited in Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.268.

63. Kalanisi, p.148, which could mean anything from two months to two years.

The only entrance to the castle and the town was through the barbican. Access to the barbican was by means of a sloping stone ramp over the fosse, leading down to the main bridge across the Orontes. Here lay the lower town (al-Madinah), and a small fort, Hisn al-Jisr, guarding one end of the bridge.⁶⁴

Of the immediate preliminaries to the coup, the sources tell us virtually nothing. We know that Ibrahim was made an honoured guest of the Banu Munkidh, and it is likely that his companions had found lodgings in the upper town. Ibrahim would undoubtedly be in contact with the local Nizaris further north, and a date was soon set for the attempt. This was the Christian Easter (29 March 1114), an obvious choice because it was well-known that the Banu Munkidh went out in state to grace the Christian festival with their presence before going off to hunt or to visit neighbouring castles for the rest of the day.⁶⁵

64. E. Honigmann, "Shaizar", EI, iv, pp.288-9; P.K. Hitti, Memoirs of an Arab-Syrian Gentleman (New York, 1929), Introduction, pp.4-6. An impression of the site and remains of the castle (about 1938) may be gained from plates 47-49 in W. Müller-Wiener, Castles of the Crusaders (English edition, London, 1966).

65. Most sources agree on 507 / 1113-14, though Ibn al-Athir gives 502 / 1109 (RHC. Or., I, p.272) which Abu'l-Fida faithfully copies (RHC. Or., I, p.10). Ibn al-Furat gives 517 / 1124 (Quatremère, p.347) but since he is reported to place the coup immediately after the Aleppo debacle, this is probably a simple error of 517 for 507. (Defrémery, p.397). Kalanisi, our most reliable contemporary source, gives Easter (p.147) but Furat gives Palm Sunday (22 March). Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.268 ignores both these dates and offers Christmas 1113, which is not mentioned in any source available to me.

The Nizari assault party appears to have arrived quite openly and been received by the Banu Munkidh as their guests. Kalanisi gives their number as 100 footsoldiers,⁶⁶ so the most obvious and time-honoured explanation for their appearance would have been that they were on their way somewhere else. Ibrahim apparently spoke for them, obtaining permission for them to rest awhile, because Kalanisi says that the Banu Munkidh showed them every kindness "when they came on their errand of mischief."⁶⁷

Besides their number, Kalanisi also tells us precisely where they came from; Sarmin, Afamiya, Ma'arrat Misrin and Ma'arrat al-Nu'man.⁶⁸ This is indeed precious information, for it is our only insight into the distribution of Nizari strength in the Jazr in these years. Obviously, there had been a remarkable recovery from the dislocations caused by Tancred's campaigns in 1105 and 1110. For the Nizaris to be active and numerous again in places from which they had been forcibly evicted only a few years before is eloquent testimony to their tenacity and determination.

The success of the coup at Shaizar depended on how swiftly the Nizaris could penetrate and occupy the citadel, for this was the key stronghold on the ridge. Their task appeared to be made easier by the fact that most of the townsfolk accompanied the men of

66. Kalanisi, p.147.

67. Kalanisi, p.148.

68. Kalanisi, p.147.

the Banu Munkidh and their troops to watch the festivities outside the lower town.⁶⁹ The initial assault on the barbican was brilliantly successful. The handful of guards were either killed or driven out, and the massive gates were barred shut as soon as the Nizari soldiers were all inside. The attackers then advanced through the upper town towards the citadel. Naturally, not all the inhabitants had gone down to watch the festival, and these loyal citizens now proved to be the Nizaris' undoing. On hearing the noise of the assault on the barbican, some townsmen had rushed to the citadel and secured one of the outer towers. From this they let down ropes to raise the womenfolk of the Banu Munkidh to the defensible upper floor of the citadel, just as the Nizaris stormed the ground floor.⁷⁰

The women of the Banu Munkidh quickly showed the townsmen where to find weapons, and a running battle developed for possession of the towers.⁷¹ Meanwhile the men of the castle realized that an assault was in progress and hurried up to the barbican, only to find the gates closed. We are told, however, that the men climbed up to join their womenfolk, so perhaps the ropes did duty again.

69. Quatremère, p.348.

70. Kalanisi, p.148; though Gibb's translation apparently corrects a confusion in earlier translations which had the women pulling the men up from the windows (Hodgson, p.94, n.33), his suggestion of the barbican for this outer tower does not make sense if, as he says, the women were being pulled up from the citadel, where one would logically expect the harem apartments to be.

71. Usamah ibn Munkidh, transl. P.K. Hitti, Memoirs of an Arab Syrian Gentleman (New York, 1929), p.154.

There they joined their loyal subjects and together attacked the Nizaris in increasing numbers. Many were killed, and the remainder forced to scatter to various parts of the castle where they were tracked down and slaughtered one by one.⁷² But to judge from Usamah's recollections of "the day on which we were engaged in combat with the Isma^cilites in the castle of Shaizar", the conflict was bitter and protracted.⁷³ Not a few of both parties appear to have been thrown from the battlements, and the Nizaris may have accounted for nearly their own number in dead and wounded defenders.⁷⁴ One of Usamah's most vivid recollections is of his mother seating her daughter on the balcony overlooking the precipitous drop to the river on the eastern side of the tower, ready to push her over "rather than see her captive in the hands of the peasants and ravishers".⁷⁵

The Nizaris were slaughtered to a man, and all those in the town who sympathized with their doctrines were also put to death.⁷⁶ The fate of the da^ci Ibrahim is not recorded, but on the other hand, nothing is heard of him again. Among the dead were probably several

72. Usamah describes how one was found in a stable, while another fought single-handed in a cul-de-sac against all-comers until one of Shaizar's ablest swordsmen managed to despatch him. (Hitti, Memoirs . . . , pp.190, 192-3.) Hitti assumes that there were several Nizari attempts on Shaizar; Usamah's own accounts, as they are translated, all point to a single episode.

73. Hitti, Memoirs . . . , p.192.

74. Hitti, Memoirs . . . , pp.107, 146.

75. Hitti, Memoirs . . . , p.154.

76. Kalanisi, p.148.

of the Nizari leaders in the Jazr, one of whom Usamah names; one 'Alwan ibn Harrar,⁷⁷ about whom we know nothing beyond Usamah's anecdote.

This loss of what was surely a picked force of volunteers, the cream of Nizari manpower in the Jazr, must have been a crippling blow to the already weakened da'wa. Recovery from the double catastrophe of 1114 would be slow and painstaking.⁷⁸

It is therefore not surprising that we hear very little of Nizari activity in northern Syria for several years after 1114, but I am not convinced that this year saw the end of a distinctively Aleppine "phase" in the history of the Syrian da'wa.⁷⁹ There is nothing to suggest an abandonment of the area, and no hint of a move elsewhere for at least another five years.⁸⁰ The main focus of the da'wa's interests and existence remained in and around Aleppo.

The immediate concern of the remaining Nizari da'is would be the consolidation and gradual expansion of surviving followings, and we have seen that these had indeed survived in the Jazr and

77. Lack of diacritical marks in the MS. make this reading conjectural; upwards of half a dozen different spellings are possible. (Hitti, Memoirs . . ., p.153).

78. Accounts of the attempt on Shaizar are found in Kalanisi, pp.147-8; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.548; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.272; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.10; Quatremère, pp.347-8; Defrémery, pp.395-397; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.268-9.

79. B. Lewis, Assassins, p.100; this convenient but simplified analysis into "phases" of establishment seems to me positively misleading for the period 1114-1124, as I hope will be apparent from the following chapter.

80. See below, pp.140-141.

Jabal Summak. This return to clandestine preaching and conversion would inevitably escape the notice of the chroniclers, so their silence cannot be regarded as conclusive proof of a halt in the life of the da'wa and its activity after 1114. A remnant survived, which would have included many refugees from Aleppo, around which the da'wa could be rebuilt.⁸¹

81. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.268-9.

CHAPTER V

ALEPPO and DAMASCUS, 1114-1125

It seems unlikely that the Syrian da'wa received significant aid or reinforcement from Alamut after the double disaster of 1114, if the leadership of the da'wa is any indication. The leaders who perished at Aleppo were replaced by da'is already working in Syria, though these were, of course, Persian and originally from Alamut. We have already encountered one of them, Abu Muhammad, who was active in the Jabal Summak from about 1107. Though one of the most senior da'is of those surviving, the leadership of the da'wa did not go to Abu Muhammad in 1114; this honour fell to another Persian whom we have not hitherto encountered, Bahram al-Asadabadi.

Bahram had been active in Syria at least five years longer than Abu Muhammad. He came of a traditionally Shi'ite family which had adopted the Nizari cause. His maternal uncle, a high-ranking courtier and representative of the Sultan, was for a time a secret Nizari in the heart of the Saljuk imperial administration. He was denounced, however, and executed in 1101 on Barkyaruk's orders.¹

Bahram fled to Syria immediately after his uncle's execution,

1. Ibn al-Athir, cited in Hodgson, p.89. An editorial note in RHC. Or., I, p.367 briefly comments on Bahram's uncle; the relevant passage in the Kamil, like so many other Iraki items (for which Athir is generally more reliable than Syrian affairs), is omitted from the Recueil version. The Recueil editors also prefer an alternative reading for Bahram's surname; al-Asterabadi, which is the modern town of Gorgan, just south-east of the Caspian Sea.

and entered the service of the da'wa at Aleppo. He appears to have become an itinerant da'i, charged with a roving commission to travel from district to district, preaching, converting, and perhaps keeping an eye on subordinate da'is.² He seems to have shown himself more capable than most in this role, and with the elimination of the da'wa's leaders in 1114, found himself the senior da'i in Syria.³

As for the activities and policies of the first few years of Bahram's leadership, we can only speculate. The emphasis would be on consolidation of numbers, so preaching activities probably claimed most of the da'wa's energies. There are no reports of further attempts to seize castles; the da'wa would not have had the necessary manpower for at least a few years, and it is more than likely that many fortress commanders emulated the example of the Banu Munkidh, who, we are told, "kept a strict watch" against any repetition of the 1114 coup.⁴

But until the da'wa could secure defensible headquarters of its own, growth would always be limited and vulnerable. The strategy of direct castle seizure had been tried and had failed. Until the da'wa was stronger, the only feasible policy was that originally employed at Aleppo, namely to seek the favour of a ruler who would protect the movement until it was strong enough to capture a castle,

2. Kalanisi, p.179; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.367.

3. Lewis, "The Ismā'īlites and the Assassins," in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.115.

4. Kalanisi, p.148.

and who might even be persuaded to cede a castle to them. Aleppo was still the likeliest place for this policy to succeed, but the Nizaris were to wait five years before the city acquired a ruler suitably disposed to favour them.

In the meantime, we may be sure that the Nizaris did not neglect their opportunities, for the city had sunk to a state bordering on anarchy not long after Ridwan's death. His successor, the weak and erratic Alp Arslan, was murdered in September 1114, and power was openly assumed by the eunuch Lu'lu'.⁵ Lu'lu's position was so precarious that he did not dare to venture forth from the citadel.⁶ The defences of the city were neglected now that the Franks of Antioch under Tancred's nephew Roger no longer made constant raids, and we are told that parts of the walls began to fall into ruin.⁷ Years of warfare and economic dislocation had made Aleppo a far less glittering prize, and the Saljuk and Artukid amirs to the east were content for the time being to treat the impoverished city as a pawn in their disputes with the Sultan and with one another.

An illustration of this is available from 1115. In that year, a quarrel between Aksunkur Il-Bursuki and Il-Ghazi the Artukid led the Sultan to deprive Bursuki of Mosul and Il-Ghazi to flee to

5. Kalanisi, pp.148-9; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.606.

6. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.608.

7. Ibn ash-Shihnah, trans. J. Sauvaget, Les Perles Choiesies, p.27.

Syria where he joined forces with Tughtakin of Damascus.⁸ This new combination threatened Aleppo, and Lu^clu^c appealed to the Sultan for protection. The prospect of an army from the east caused Il-Ghazi and Tughtakin to seek the alliance of Roger of Antioch. This caused even more anxiety in Aleppo, and when in August 1115 Bursuk ibn Bursuk descended on Syria at the head of the Sultan's army, Lu^clu^c suddenly changed his mind and joined the Syrian alliance. Deprived of his expected base of operations and indeed of his main reason for entering Syria, Bursuk was reluctant to join battle. The inconclusive manoeuvres which followed finally led to the dispersal of the Syrian alliance. Tughtakin went home, but while the eastern army was aimlessly plundering in the Jazr, Roger and Baldwin of Edessa fell on them near Danith on 14 September and inflicted a crushing defeat.⁹

This defeat left Aleppo badly exposed to the Franks of Antioch and Edessa. Yet though the Franks occupied territory almost up to the city walls, Roger showed no desire to besiege Aleppo itself. Content with regular payment of tribute, Antioch, mounted no major attacks against the city for the next two years, while the anarchy within Aleppo continued unabated.

8. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.294.

9. Kamal al-Din, RHC. Or., III, pp.608-609; Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.297-8; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, RHC. Or., III, pp.554-5; Usamah ibn Munkidh, trans. Hitti, Memoirs . . . , p.102; Bar Hebraeus, trans. Budge, pp.247-8; Walter the Chancellor, I, 2-3, RHC. Occ., V, pp.85-89; William of Tyre, XI, 23-25, trans. Babcock and Krey, I, pp.500-505.

At this juncture, the Persian Nizaris achieved a notable success at Baghdad, which offered not a little indirect benefit for the Syrian da'wa.

Tughtakin was still under suspicion after Mawdud's assassination and in April 1116 he made a special trip to Baghdad to seek reconciliation with the Sultan. He did not return to Damascus until 25 July.¹⁰ Sometime towards the end of his stay, Tughtakin attended an audience at court with other prominent amirs. In the audience-chamber he was seated beside Ahmad-Yal, the Kurdish prince of Maragha in Azerbaijan. While they were talking, a man approached them with a petition in his hand, ostensibly to ask for it to be presented to the Sultan. But as Ahmad-Yal reached for the petition, the man drew a dagger and stabbed him. Despite this, Ahmad promptly threw his assailant to the floor, but he was then attacked and killed by the petitioner's two companions. All three assassins were immediately slaughtered by guards.¹¹

Tughtakin fled the audience-chamber in great fright, convinced that the assault had really been intended for him; we are told that though the assassins shouted encouragement to each other in Persian, they were dressed as Syrians.¹² Many people sympathized, thinking that the Sultan had attempted to wreak vengeance on

10. Kalanisi, pp.151-3.

11. Kalanisi, under A.H. 510 / 1116, cited in Hodgson, p.94 (Gibb's abridged translation omits this item); Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, pp.556-7; Defrémery, pp.397-8.

12. Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.556; Defrémery, p.397.

Tughtakin for Mawdud's death.

However, suspicion lifted from the Sultan when the assassins were recognized as Nizaris,¹³ for Ahmad-Yal was notorious as one of the Persian Nizaris' most determined adversaries. He had besieged their castles more than once, and may have been involved in the war of attrition against Alamut which had been in progress since 1108. He had figured prominently in Mawdud's Syrian campaigns a few years earlier, and at Aleppo had earned the hatred of the local Nizaris for his dealings with their sworn enemies the Banu'l-Khashshab.¹⁴

The Nizaris had ample reason to eliminate Ahmad-Yal, but because he had been more active in Persia than in Syria, the attempt was probably organized from Alamut. It is perhaps significant that the Saljuks at last mounted a full-scale siege of Alamut in the very next year, 1117. However, the assassination may have been made to appear Syrian in origin. The Nizaris planned their major attempts very carefully in order to achieve maximum public impact. The two people most likely to be impressed on this occasion were the Sultan, to show him that the fida'is could penetrate even his audience-chamber, and Tughtakin. If the ruler of Damascus thought that there were Nizaris in Syria capable of such deeds, perhaps next against himself, he might treat more indulgently any Nizaris who appeared in Damascus. What we know of Hasan-i Sabbah makes such contingency-planning quite plausible.¹⁵

13. Kamal, under A.H. 509, cited by Hodgson, p.112, n.38.

14. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.262.

15. Defrémery, pp.397-8; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.262.

For the present, however, the main hopes of the Syrian da'wa still seemed to be fixed on Aleppo where Lu'lu's rule was now drawing to a close. The former ra'is Ibn Badi' had apparently returned to the city after Alp Arslan's death, for he is now depicted as fomenting bitter local opposition to the eunuch's rule. Faction fights in the streets, this time between supporters of Lu'lu' and Ibn Badi', again became commonplace.¹⁶ But Ibn Badi' was not the only threat to Lu'lu's dwindling power. A more powerful and potentially dangerous interest in Aleppo was that taken by Aksunkur Il-Bursuki of Mosul. Not surprisingly, in April 1117, Lu'lu' gave up the unequal struggle and fled. On reaching Balis, he was murdered by Turks of his own entourage. It was said that Bursuki had bribed them; if so, he derived no immediate return from his investment for the government of Aleppo was taken over by another eunuch, Yaruktash.¹⁷ However, the rule of Yaruktash lasted no more than a few months. He tried to conciliate the Franks by giving them al-Kubba, but this so roused popular feeling that he was forced to retire when a coup installed the Damascene Abu'l-Mali ibn Milhi as regent. Ibn Milhi's first action was to expel Ibn Badi', who probably took refuge once again with Malik ibn Salim at

16. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.277.

17. Kalanisi, pp.155-6; Kamal al-Din, RHC. Or., III, pp.610-611.

Qal'at Ja'bar.¹⁸

Ibn Milhi now had to contend with Bursuki's most powerful rival for control over Aleppo. Il-Ghazi the Artukid, prince of Mardin, was not only powerful but somewhat more in need of additions to his territory than Bursuki. He is of importance here, because he was to become the Nizaris' new patron.

Il-Ghazi appeared at Aleppo in the middle of 1117 and appropriated the fort of Qal'at ash-Sharif as his residence, but when he found that the district utterly lacked provisions for his troops and horses, he was forced to withdraw.¹⁹ On his way he installed his own garrison at Balis, and these troops now began to make occasional raids towards Aleppo.²⁰ Accordingly, when Ibn Milhi received overtures from Khirkhan of Hims, he readily accepted them, but while Khirkhan was prevented from coming to Aleppo by Tughtakin, Ibn Milhi was unexpectedly overthrown by another eunuch, Karaja.

In view of the instability and ineptitude of government by these eunuchs, the defence of the city had been assumed by the kadi, Abu'l-Fadl ibn Khashshab, and when Il-Ghazi returned to Aleppo in

18. Ibn al-Furat, cited in Cahen, "Mouvements populaires . . ." Arabica, V, (1958), p.242, which says Ibn Badi' was expelled by a new Damascene regent and succeeded as ra'is by Ibrahim al-Furati in 511 / 1117. B. Lewis, "The Isma'ilites and the Assassins", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.114, said that Ibn Badi' was expelled in 1119 by Alp Arslan; but Alp was assassinated in 1114. Lewis, Assassins, p.104, retains 1119 but carefully omits mention of who expelled Ibn Badi'.

19. Kalanisi, p.157, giving the date as June-July 1117.

20. Kamal al-Din, RHC. Or., III, p.611.

1118, it was this notable with whom he negotiated. Ibn Khashshab reflected the opinion of the leading families of the city, who were apprehensive of Il-Ghazi's power, and the amir had actually moved off in disgust before the notables changed their minds and let him into the city. Il-Ghazi installed himself in the citadel, expelled the eunuchs' sycophants and even some remnants of Ridwan's entourage, paid up the arrears of tribute owing to Antioch, and wrote to Tughtakin confirming their alliance.²¹

Il-Ghazi was not only Aleppo's strongest ruler since Ridwan; he was also disposed to tolerate the Nizaris, and for much the same motives as Ridwan. The curious xenophobia of the citizens isolated him from any local following,²² and if the Nizaris offered him support, he had no religious scruples to prevent him accepting it. From the Nizaris' point of view, he seemed an even better patron than Ridwan. In the first place, he was an Artukid, not a Saljuk, and therefore had no strong ties with the Sultanate. Secondly, he was not utterly dependent on Aleppo as Ridwan had been; Il-Ghazi's main interests lay in the Jazira beyond Edessa, in Mardin and Diyarbakir where he had been busy filching territory from petty Saljuk governors. This made him a more powerful ally, and opened up the prospect of expanding the da'wa into new areas under his control.

Though Il-Ghazi seemed to be even friendlier than Ridwan he was in fact simply a very shrewd ruler. He could encourage the

21. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.613-615.

22. J. Sauvaget, Alep, p.98.

the Nizaris to think he was their devoted patron and protector at Aleppo even while building a Sunnite madrassa at Mardin, and, what is more, justify himself to the satisfaction of both parties.²³ Though evidence is scanty, Il-Ghazi appears to have made cautious use of Nizari support in 1118 and 1119, even while courting the support of the Banu'l-Khashshab. It was now that the Nizaris probably reappeared openly in Aleppo, and as Bahram ingratiated himself with Il-Ghazi, the sectaries doubtless returned to their old tactics of terror and intimidation against their Sunnite adversaries in the city.²⁴

It was probably also at this time that da'is began to travel north-east and extend the preaching into Il-Ghazi's territories on the upper Tigris, for only a few years later a sizeable Nizari "presence" is reported in the area.²⁵ The lesson of the 1114 debacle at Aleppo had surely not been lost on Bahram; the da'wa must expand into new areas and avoid the earlier concentration of activity in one main area, so that if a similar reverse occurred again, the da'wa would not suffer such a crippling blow. Il-Ghazi's alliance with Tughtakin seems to have suggested to Bahram an even more exciting challenge than the Diyar Bakir; expansion into southern Syria, into Damascus itself.

23. Cahen, "Le Diyar Bakr au temps des premiers Urtukides," JA (1935) p.237; on Il-Ghazi and the Artukids in general, the most up to date outline is Cahen's article, "Artukids", EI 2, i, pp.662-6.

24. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.367; Ibn al-Furat, cited in Defrémery, p.348.

25. C. Cahen. "Le Diyar Bakr au temps des Premiers Urtukides", JA (1935), p.237, citing Ibn al-Furat.

Though Damascus was renowned as a trenchantly Sunni city, Shi'ites were tolerated there and Bahram would have known that there was a Fatimid colony in the city.²⁶ Ridwan's patronage at Aleppo had shown that with the ruler's protection a dar al-da'wa could be set up even in the midst of a hostile populace. There were prospects for expansion in the districts around Damascus as well; we have already noted the Druzes and Nusayri communities in the Mount Hermon area who were far closer to Isma'ili doctrine than the Sunnites and Twelver Shi'ites in the city itself.²⁷

Il-Ghazi visited Damascus towards the end of 1118. In December, Tughtakin accompanied him back to Aleppo, where they agreed to spend the winter together gathering troops in the Jazira for a major campaign against the Franks in the summer of the following year.²⁸ On their way from Aleppo, they paused at Qal'at Ja'bar to put their alliance into formal terms and to write appeals to other amirs, urging them to join in holy war. They appear to have stayed here over December-January 1118-1119.²⁹

This seems the likeliest opportunity for Bahram to press Il-Ghazi to make approaches to Tughtakin on his behalf. What passed between the two rulers we do not know, but what issued from their discussion is well-attested. Il-Ghazi prevailed upon Tughtakin to

26. See S.M. Stern, "The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir . . .", JRAS (1950), pp.30-31.

27. See above, pp. 63-4.

28. Kalanisi, p.158; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.615.

29. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.616.

give Bahram a letter of recommendation which would enable him to take up residence at Damascus and conduct his preaching activities there without molestation.³⁰

Tughtakin's motives are nowhere adequately explained except for a suggestive phrase in Kalanisi which says that Tughtakin protected them and humoured them "in order to ward off their malice".³¹ We lack means to read men's minds; perhaps Tughtakin had been more impressed than he cared to admit by the assassinations of Mawdud and Ahmad-Yal so close to his own person.³²

Treaty-making was not the only significant happening at Qal'at Ja'bar that month. Whether as a display to encourage Il-Ghazi and Tughtakin to be generous towards Bahram, or as an expression of their new confidence after receiving Tughtakin's assurances, the Nizaris assassinated the former ra'is of Aleppo, Sa'id ibn Badi, as he was stepping into a boat to cross the river and ask Il-Ghazi to reinstate him at Aleppo. His two sons who were with him struggled with and killed the two assassins. Both sons were wounded and one died

30. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.616; Kalanisi p.179 is explicit about the letter and the agreement which had been made, but gives no date. It must have been before Il-Ghazi's death in 1122, and it is significant that the Nizari leader at Aleppo in 1120 was Abu Muhammad, not Bahram. In the light of what we know about the movements of Il-Ghazi and Tughtakin, their sojourn at Qal'at Ja'bar seems by far the likeliest opportunity for such an agreement, especially since Kamal specifically says they made a treaty there.

31. Kalanisi, p.187.

32. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.367 goes so far as to assert that Tughtakin took Bahram into his own entourage, but no other source mentions this.

almost at once, but the other was carried to a nearby fort only to be set upon and killed by a third Nizari. The guards caught this Nizari and took him to Il-Ghazi and Tughtakin. It is said that they did not even torture him, but were content merely to lock him up; unusually mild treatment for a murderer caught in the act. But the assassin was not to be deprived of his glory; he found a way to throw himself from the battlements into the river where he drowned.³³

Ibn Badi's assassination was obviously the tactical elimination of a powerful enemy who could have caused the Nizaris great harm if he had returned to Aleppo. It was, as well, an example of Nizari retribution, for we have seen the share Ibn Badi had in the slaughter of Nizaris at Aleppo in 1114. Their revenge was sure, if at times a little tardy.

Shortly after Ibn Badi's assassination, Il-Ghazi and Tughtakin left on their troop-raising campaign. The army they collected entered Syria in June and encamped at Kinnasrin to await Tughtakin's return with the army of Damascus.

Roger of Antioch had been promised aid from Jerusalem, but was impatient, and marched out to meet this new threat before Tughtakin returned to join Il-Ghazi. The result was one of the most crushing and sanguinary defeats the Franks ever experienced in Syria. On 28 June 1119, virtually the entire army of Antioch was destroyed in

33. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.616; Quatremère, pp.345-6; and Defrémery, pp.398-9, both quoting Ibn al-Furat.

the slaughter known to the Latin chroniclers as the ager sanguinis.³⁴
 The confused manoeuvring which followed and the inconclusive battle with the relieving forces from Jerusalem and Tripoli, fought near Danith on 13 August, could not detract from Il-Ghazi's tremendous victory. But illness prevented him from following it up, and while he convalesced at Aleppo his booty-laden levies melted away into the Jazira.³⁵

The Nizaris' choice of patron seemed now to be an inspired stroke of brilliance, but unfortunately Il-Ghazi was not prepared to make Aleppo his capital. His main interests were to the north-east and though he was again at Aleppo in May and June 1120, he appointed his son Shams al-Dawla Sulaiman to be governor of the city and one Mikki ibn Kurnass as police-chief in September of that year.³⁶

This appears to have disquieted the Nizaris; perhaps they were doubtful of Sulaiman's capacity to maintain his father's protection. Whatever the immediate cause, the Nizaris at Aleppo suddenly felt the need of some additional security.

Sometime in 1120 or early 1121, the Nizari leader at Aleppo,

34. Kalanisi, pp.159-161; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.617-620; Usamah ibn Munkidh, trans. Hitti, Memoirs . . ., pp.148-149; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.324; Sibte ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, pp.560-561; Walter the Chancellor, II, 2-6, RHC. Occ., V, pp.201-211; Fulcher, III, 3, RHC. Occ., III, p.442; William of Tyre, XII, 9-10, trans. Babcock and Krey, I, pp.528-531; Matthew of Edessa, RHC. Arm., I, pp.122-3.

35. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.620-622.

36. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.622-3, 627.

the da'ī Abu Muhammad, sent an envoy with gifts and a letter to Il-Ghazi at Mardin. The letter asked if Il-Ghazi would cede to the sectaries the little castle of Qal'at ash-Sharif, just outside the south wall of the city, which the Nizaris had occupied briefly at the end of Ridwan's reign. Il-Ghazi's reaction, if our sources are to be relied on, reveals both his capacity for adroit and skilful handling of a compromising situation and perhaps his true attitude towards the Nizaris. He replied to the envoy without hesitation that he had just issued orders for that castle to be demolished because it could prove a liability in the hands of a besieging army, but that if the demolition had not begun, the Nizaris were welcome to it. He then directed his secretary to offer the envoy refreshment while the necessary papers were drawn up. As soon as the envoy had gone out, Il-Ghazi quickly sent orders to Aleppo by pigeon post for Sulaiman to demolish part of the fort and settle as many people within the ruins as he could. This had been done by the time the envoy returned to Abu Muhammad at Aleppo. When Abu Muhammad offered to rebuild the place, Il-Ghazi replied that this would involve too many disputes with the families already settled there. No doubt enjoying the rich irony, he gently chided the Nizaris for not approaching him secretly in this matter!³⁷

37. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.628 which has Sulaiman and Ibn Kurnass conducting the demolition. Dhahabi, cited in Quatremère, pp.346-7, and Defrémery, pp.399-401, has another version in which the demolition was undertaken on the initiative of the citizens and especially the kadi Ibn Khashshab, Kamal has 515 / 1121 but the other sources cited by Quatremère and Defrémery agree on 514 / April 1120 - March 1121. See also Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.346-7.

The fact that Abu Muhammad is named as the Nizari leader in Aleppo at this time strongly suggests that Bahram had already gone south to Damascus in pursuance of the agreement between Il-Ghazi and Tughtakin. He need not have settled there permanently as yet, however, because the sources say that he continued to travel widely in Syria, attending to the affairs of the da'wa,³⁸ but it is possible that he was in Damascus and perhaps even involved in a curious episode which occurred there before April 1121.³⁹

An Aleppine named Ibn Fashim was attacked and killed in broad daylight on a crowded city street by a Nizari who shouted that this man had been spying on the Syrian Nizaris and passing information to no less a person than the Fatimid wazir al-Afdal himself. Passersby apparently tried to prevent the slaying, but were reluctant to arrest the assassin when he declared himself to be a Nizari, for fear of the sectaries' vengeance.⁴⁰

Allowance must be made for the possibility that the murderer had nothing to do with the Nizaris and simply claimed the connexion as a useful alibi, but for the chroniclers to single out this instance from the many which would have been attributed in anger or ignorance to the "Batinis", must surely give us pause. It would not be unusual for a Fatimid agent to be keeping a wary eye on Nizari activity, and even less unusual for the Nizaris to seize an opportunity to hurt the

38. Kalanisi, p.179.

39. The end of A.H. 514.

40. Quatremère, p.347; Defrémery, pp.402-403. See also Hodgson, p.105.

imposter caliphate of Cairo. But far more interesting is the implication that there was already a Nizari following in Damascus at this time; the fear of the bystanders is most suggestive. However, Ibn Fashim's Aleppine origins could also indicate that his work had been in the north and that he had been followed to Damascus by a fida'i ordered to eliminate him. In the absence of further details or even a shred of corroboratory evidence, we cannot judge how strong the Nizaris may have been in the south at this time. What is clear, if the story is true, is the deep and continued estrangement between Nizari and Musta'lian forms of Isma'ilism.

Not unnaturally, when the Fatimid wazir al-Afdal was himself assassinated in December 1121, the Nizaris were blamed immediately. They would almost certainly have been glad to see dead the man who had deposed Nizar and perverted the imamate, but there are strong indications that they were not responsible for al-Afdal's death. Kalanisi is adamant on this point; he says the accusation against the Nizaris was "an empty pretence and an insubstantial calumny". The real cause, he says, was the quarrel between al-Afdal and the Caliph al-Amir, who was kept in virtual confinement. When news came of al-Afdal's death, the caliph is said to have manifested unrestrained delight before all his courtiers.⁴¹

Kalanisi had no cause to make excuses for the Nizaris; he is grateful of opportunities to abuse them and show up their perfidy, but he always tries to be fair. Even the later chroniclers who do

41. Kalanisi, pp.163-4.

blame them are sufficiently aware of the doubts involved to give alternative explanations for al-Afdal's murder.⁴² That the instigation belongs to al-Amir seems almost certain, and it is unlikely that al-Amir would debase himself so far as to ask for Nizari aid in the execution of his plans.⁴³

The Nizari schism was obviously still a live issue for the Fatimid government, and in December 1122, exactly a year after al-Afdal's death, a remarkable public meeting was convened to hear official affirmations of the legality of the Musta'lian imamate. The star performer at this gathering was Nizar's own sister, who made a public renunciation of her brother's claims. The Caliph at once had a sijill (proclamation) drawn up embodying the findings of this meeting, to be read throughout Egypt, and an expanded version sent out to Musta'lian communities elsewhere as a hidaya or official letter.⁴⁴

We are fortunate to possess a copy of the letter sent to the Fatimid Isma'ili congregation at Damascus, for it has a most important and illuminating appendix added by the Fatimid da'i there.⁴⁵

42. Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.342-3.

43. Ibn Muyassar, cited Hodgson, p.108, says that al-Amir himself professed to blame the Nizaris. See also Defrémery, pp.403-405 for details of the growing estrangement between al-Afdal and al-Amir.

44. Ibn Muyassar, cited in S.M. Stern, "The Epistle of the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir (al-Hidaya al-Amiriyya) - its Date and its Purpose", JRAS, (1950) pp.22-23.

45. Arabic text edited A.A.A. Fyzee, al-Hidayatu'l Amiriya (Oxford, 1938), Islamic Research Association Series, No.7.

This da'ci relates that when the letter was read out to the congregation, a Nizari who was present asked if he could show the document to his leader. When the letter was read out at the Nizari gathering, it apparently caused an uproar and thier chief da'ci was moved to write a refutation in the blank space at the end of the manuscript. The Nizari then took the letter back to the Fatimid meeting, and read his master's refutation to them; this also caused an uproar. The Fatimid da'ci then added his account of the exchange and sent the letter back to Cairo asking for advice on how to silence the sectaries. He notes the exact date of the meeting, and if it follows the year in which the great public gathering was held in Egypt, it would be 26 February, 1123.⁴⁶

The implications of this fortuitous insight are extremely interesting. They indicate that a body of Nizaris large enough to support a da'ci qualified to pronounce on the imamate was present in Damascus at this time and was known and recognized by the Fatimids there. Though there is no supporting evidence which might tell us how many of them there were, or the da'ci's name, it is possible that such an important refutation may have been written by Bahram himself. The most that can be ventured on such scanty but precious information is that Bahram's preaching since he left Aleppo seems to have borne fruit in a strongly Sunnite setting and that at least the nucleus of

46. Stern, "Epistle . . ." pp.30-31, where he discusses the dating. It should be mentioned at this point that the violently polemical second half of this letter contains one of the very few extant instances of the term hashishiyya used as an abusive designation for the Syrian Nizaris. (Hodgson, pp. 136-7.)

a new branch of the Syrian da'wa had been established in Damascus by 1123.

The wisdom of Bahram's decision to extend the da'wa southwards was made increasingly clear by events in the north after 1122. Il-Ghazi was not noted for moderation in food or drink⁴⁷ so nobody was surprised to hear that in July or August 1123 he had fallen ill with an acute stomach disorder at Aleppo. He was immobilized for two months until he felt well enough to return home to Mardin, but the rigours of the journey overcame him and he died on the way, not far from Diyar Bakir.⁴⁸

The Artukid territories then witnessed a rapid reshuffle of rulers. Il-Ghazi's eldest son Shams al-Dawla Sulaiman went to Mayyafarikin, leaving his cousin Badr al-Dawla Sulaiman in charge at Aleppo, while Mardin was seized by a younger brother, Timurtash.⁴⁹ Watching all this with alert interest was Il-Ghazi's nephew, Nur al-Dawla Balak, who saw in Il-Ghazi's domains the logical extension of his own growing territories in the Jazira. This ruthless and ambitious prince had already won great prestige by capturing Joscelin of Edessa in September 1122; he now repeated the exercise with the far more significant capture of King Baldwin himself in April, 1123.⁵⁰

47. Kalanisi, p.149 says that when he got drunk, Il-Ghazi would remain in a blind stupor for several days afterwards.

48. Kalanisi, p.166 gives 8 November; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.633-4 gives 3 November; Matthew of Edessa, RHC. Arm., I, p.132.

49. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.634.

50. Kamal, RHC, Or., III, p.635-6; Matthew of Edessa, RHC. Arm., I, p.133; William of Tyre, XII, 17, (not 11 as in Runciman II, p.162, n.2) trans. Babcock and Krey, I, pp.539-541.

These were chance successes however, and Balak's ambition was not to deal a death-blow to the Franks but to seize as much as he could of the Artukid inheritance. Aleppo was the most obvious and vulnerable of all Il-Ghazi's former domains. In May 1123 Balak blockaded the city and devastated its districts. On 26 June, the city capitulated and Balak took possession of the citadel. He exiled Ridwan's young son Sultanshah to Harran to take the wind out of any loyalist factions, and set about imposing his rule on the city.⁵¹

In place of Il-Ghazi's shrewd diplomacy, Aleppo now tasted Balak's preference for brute force.⁵² The Nizaris must have felt the wind beginning to change as soon as Il-Ghazi fell ill and died, because his patronage of their cause had been severely criticized by the citizens, and anti-sectarian feeling was beginning to mount. Not altogether unconnected with this rise of opinion was the demolition or conversion into mosques of all remaining Christian churches in Aleppo in October 1123, at the urging of the kadi Ibn Khashshab.⁵³ The Nizaris would have realized that Balak had no need of their support and that their position in the city was once again dangerously vulnerable.

Balak finally moved against the Nizaris in January 1124, but curiously enough there was no bloodbath. The chroniclers leave us in ignorance of the events which led up to it, but on 15 January,

51. Kalanisi, pp.167-8; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.636.

52. See Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.637 for Balak's massacres of prisoners and peasants.

53. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.638.

as Balak was returning to Aleppo from a visit to the Jazira, he arrested the agent of the chief da'i and sent orders ahead for the sectaries to leave the city at once. This was at least preferable to being massacred, for there were now strong centres of Nizari activity in the north-east and in the south as well as the older centres in the Jazr to which the refugees could flee. Manpower was too precious to waste in futile resistance, so the Nizaris of Aleppo quietly sold their furniture and their houses and departed.⁵⁴

The Nizaris were not the only ones affected by Balak's tightening-up campaign. He also expelled the kadi Ibn Khashshab and the ra'is Fada'il ibn Sa'id ibn Badi' in a vain attempt to quieten the city factions.⁵⁵ On the contrary, Aleppo plunged again into instability and faction strife. Fada'il was succeeded as ra'is by a Persian, Salman ibn Abd al-Razzak, who was murdered in March 1124. He was in turn replaced by a notable from Harran, one of

54. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.640; Quatremère, pp.348-9; Defrémery, p.408. Kamal says the man arrested at the border was "the agent of Bahram the Batini leader at Aleppo". This need not contradict my assumption that Bahram had by this time established a following in Damascus; Aleppo was still the seat of the whole Syrian da'wa and Kamal would naturally assume that the head of the da'wa was resident there. Kalanisi p.179 says that Bahram continued to travel widely; it is logical that Aleppo would figure prominently in these travels, and it is not impossible that he was actually visiting the city early in 1124.

55. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.640; Ibn al-Furat, cited in Cahen, "Mouvements populaires . . ." Arabica, V (1958) p.243 for the succession of Ibn Badi's son Fada'il to the riyasa; see also Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.298.

Balak's proteges, Sa'dan ibn Sa'danah.⁵⁶

The Nizari refugees from Aleppo, however many there were, probably scattered to join Nizari followings elsewhere. Some may have gone to join Bahram at Damascus; many would have stayed in the north or gone up to Diyar Bakir to join the brethren there.

Yet again, the da'wa had been deprived of its operational headquarters, but the loss was not so acute this time, and certainly not unforeseen. The main energies of the da'wa now lay elsewhere, and in A.H. 518 / 1124-25 one of those areas attempted to show its strength. In that year, the Nizaris of Diyar Bakir (Amid) staged a coup to seize control of the city. The attempt failed miserably, and in the confusion which followed some seven hundred Nizaris are reported to have been massacred.⁵⁷

Even allowing for the customary inflation of chroniclers' numerical estimates, this seems to have been as great a holocaust as that at Aleppo ten years earlier. It is much to be regretted that no further details are available, other than one which helps explain how the Nizaris had expanded so remarkably in the Diyar Bakir. Besides Il-Ghazi's patronage before 1122, the Nizaris apparently

56. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.641; the assassination of Salman is probably the one Cahen refers to as yet another little-known Nizari exploit (Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.348) but there is no evidence to implicate them or show why they would want to murder him. The Nizaris had no monopoly over political killings.

57. Cahen, "Le Diyar Bakr au temps des premiers Urtukides", JA (1935) pp.237-8; Defrémery, p.405 (both citing Athir and Sibit, but the Recueil versions of these two sources omit all mention of this episode); Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.348.

enjoyed the support of the rich and well-established Nisanid family at Diyar Bakir. They were still being castigated for their support of the sectaries in Saladin's time.⁵⁸

Expulsion from Aleppo and massacre at Diyar Bakir need not necessarily have ended Nizari activities in northern Syria. What really seemed to spell the end of any further prospects there was the new ruler at Aleppo. After Balak's death at Manbij in May 1124,⁵⁹ Timurtash had regained control and foolishly released King Baldwin, who promptly allied with the Bedouin chieftain Dubais ibn Sadaka to besiege Aleppo in October 1124. The citizens, in desperation when Timurtash fled, appealed to Mosul, whose ruler set out at once, relieved the siege, and was welcomed in the city on 29 January 1125.⁶⁰

Aksunkur Il-Bursuki was a ruler of far different mettle from either Ridwan or Il-Ghazi. He had regained favour with the new sultan, Mahmud (1117-1131), and was anxious to show himself as a champion of Islam. He won great renown for his prompt action in saving Aleppo, and became popular in the city for his justice and efficient government. Kamal al-Din notes that once he had set affairs in order and made the roads safe, caravans again began to frequent Aleppo and trade revived.⁶¹ In addition to firm government and economic revival, Bursuki's rule brought a resurgence of

58. Cahen, "Mouvements populaires . . ." Arabica V (1958), p.244.

59. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.642.

60. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.647-9; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.565.

61. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.650.

orthodox feeling to Aleppo, foreshadowing the greater revival of orthodoxy that was to come under Zanki and Nur al-Din. The Nizaris could not, therefore, hope for favours from Bursuki. One witness testifies that he so strongly opposed the "Batinis" one would have had difficulty finding even a sympathizer anywhere in Bursuki's

army.⁶² Bursuki's reputation for piety stands high among the later chroniclers.⁶³

Though their prospects for open power in Aleppo were now definitely curtailed, the Nizaris still seemed capable of reaching their adversaries there. Sometime during 1125, the former kadi Ibn Khashshab was assassinated after dark near his house in the city. The culprits were not caught, but it was readily assumed that Nizaris had killed him. Always allowing for the possibility of some private quarrel or an unknown faction struggle, the Nizaris certainly had ample cause to murder Ibn Khashshab. He had been their most determined adversary since their very first appearance in Aleppo, and with Sa'id ibn Badi' had been the main instigator of the 1114 massacre.⁶⁴

62. Abu Tahir al-Salafi, quoted in Kamal al-Din's Bughyat, RHC. Or., III, p.725.

63. See Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.16.

64. Ibn ash-Shihna (citing a lost chronicle by Zayn al-Din ibn Abd ar-Rahim), trans. Sauvaget, Les Perles Choies (Beirut, 1933) p.65; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.347-8, citing Furat and Ibn Muyassar. Some writers assume that Ibn Khashshab died for his part in the demolition of Qal'at ash-Sharif in 1120, but this involved no loss of Nizari lives, and the sources are not agreed that he was actually involved. (Quatremère, p.347; Defrémery, p.401; Lewis, "The Ismā'īlites and the Assassins", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.115.)

Ibn Khashshab's assassination made a profound impact on Aleppo. The Nizaris had been expelled, yet seemed still to be powerful and in the midst of affairs. Little wonder, then, that one of the notable families of the city openly professed adherence to the Nizaris for fear of suffering the same fate as the kadi.⁶⁵

Their fear was groundless, however, for this appears to have been the Nizaris' parting gesture. Nothing more is known of Nizari activity in Aleppo after 1125.

65. Ibn al-Furat, cited in Sauvaget, Alep (Paris, 1941) p.98.

CHAPTER VI

DAMASCUS, 1125-1129

The main focus of the da'wa had quietly shifted southwards, to Damascus. In the year following Ibn Khashshab's assassination, Kalanisi has an entry which states that the influence of Bahram al-Asadabadi had grown so formidable he was "a power to reckon with" in Aleppo and Syria. Since Balak had expelled the Nizaris from the city two years before, and nothing is heard of Nizari activity in Aleppo after 1125, it seems likely that Kalanisi is making a retrospective summary of Bahram's activity in Aleppo; a favourite device of the chroniclers to overcome the rigid annalistic subdivision of events into their respective years. He had, Kalanisi continues, lived in "extreme concealment and secrecy", often in disguise, before coming to Damascus with the letter of recommendation Il-Ghazi had persuaded Tughtakin to give him. He was received with honour at Damascus; "every consideration was shown him and protection was assured him after suffering many vicissitudes of fortune."¹

No date is given for Bahram's first open appearance in Damascus, but as we have seen in the previous chapter there are a few indications which point to an earlier date than 1126, the year under which Kalanisi makes these observations. Kalanisi himself supplies one of these indications by depicting Bahram in yet another phase of travel, after he had arrived in Damascus: "He moved about from

1. Kalanisi, p.179.

place to place and gained a following among the ignorant and witless mob, and foolish peasantry, men lacking both intelligence and religion"²

Because we have no further evidence which would enable us to pinpoint the start of Bahram's operations in the south, we again fall back on guesses. I prefer the earlier dating mainly for the reasons outlined above,³ but also because the Nizaris seemed to take some time to build up strong followings even in traditionally Shi'ite areas. We might reasonably expect this to take longer in a traditionally Sunnite area such as southern Syria.⁴

In Damascus itself, Bahram could hope for little more than formal recognition from Tughtakin. Whether from fear or a sense of honour which kept him faithful to his agreement with Il-Ghazi or something of both, Tughtakin tolerated the Nizaris as potentially dangerous adversaries who were better humoured and kept quiet than needlessly provoked.

Nonetheless, Bahram soon found an influential ally at Damascus who was prepared to help the Nizaris more positively. This was the

2. Kalanisi, p.179.

3. See p.142, n.30.

4. My views on Bahram's arrival at Damascus are at variance from those of Professor Bernard Lewis, who not only states (in Assassins, p.105) that Bahram first appeared there late in 1126 but that he had "a letter of recommendation, from Il-Ghazi, the new ruler of Aleppo". This is indeed curious, since Il-Ghazi had died in 1122. The new ruler of Aleppo in 1126 could only be Bursuki or his son Izz al-Din Masud.

wazir, Abu'Ali Tahir ibn Sa'd al-Mazdakani. There is no suggestion that he was ever actually converted to Isma'ilism; Kalanisi observes that he helped Bahram "even though he was not of his way of thinking".⁵ Like Ridwan, Mazdakani supported the sectaries for his own political advantage. The wazir could not employ Tughtakin's troops for his personal protection, and his rank placed him above the localized loyalties of the city factions. The prospect of possessing an efficient and disciplined band of supporters within the city would have appealed very strongly to Mazdakani, both as an instrument and a defence for his private schemes. He could not otherwise develop a loyal following of his own; the instability of the Damascus mob was notorious,⁶ and the ahdath bands were firmly controlled by the city's leading families. The foremost of these, the Banu'l-Sufi, also happened to be Mazdakani's most determined political adversaries. Their head, Thiqat al-Mulk Abu'l-Dhuwad Mufarrij ibn al-Sufi, was the ra'is of Damascus, and at least one source testifies that Mazdakani supported the Nizaris simply for fear of the Banu'l-Sufi's considerable power in the city.⁷

On the other hand, since the wazir was the atabeg's personal representative and the chief officer in his government, supervising

5. Kalanisi, p.179.

6. Gibb, The Damascus Chronicle . . . Introduction, p.27.

7. Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.567; Defrémery, p.413 cites Abu'l-Mahasin for the same point, but the heavily abridged version of this source in the Recueil omits all mention of Nizari activity in Damascus.

all the various diwans or departments of state, the Nizaris found themselves closer to sources of patronage and influence than any of the city factions. Mazdakani's favour was publicly demonstrated when they were given a dar al-da'wa or town house, like that given to them in Aleppo by Ridwan.⁸

Though Mazdakani openly helped them, the Nizaris did not neglect opportunities to show their usefulness to Tughtakin. Towards the end of 1125 Baldwin II of Jerusalem assembled forces to invade the Hauran and raid the outskirts of Damascus.⁹ Tughtakin appealed as far afield as Irak and Mesopotamia for troops to meet this threat, and was joined by some 2000 Turkish cavalry, but aside from his 'askar and these reinforcements Tughtakin's forces were mostly Syrian levies and volunteers. Kalanisi describes them as a great host from the ahdath and untried youths of Damascus and surrounding districts. But in addition, and Kalanisi makes specific mention of this, there were the armed bands of the Nizaris, the "Batiniya".¹⁰

It is striking that Kalanisi, usually so ready to dismiss the Nizaris as so many half-wits and vile scum,¹¹ goes out of his way to mention that these Batini armed bands were "noted for courage and

8. Kalanisi, cited in Lewis, "The Ismā'īlites and the Assassins", the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.116, from the Arabic edition by Amedroz (Leiden, 1908); omitted from Gibb's translation.

9. Fulcher, III, 46, RHC. Occ., III, pp.473-4; William of Tyre, XIII, 18, trans. Babcock and Krey, II, p.27; Kalanisi, p.174.

10. Kalanisi, p.175.

11. Kalanisi, p.180.

gallantry". Perhaps this was not the first time they had been of assistance to Tughtakin. The armed bands were not merely foot-soldiers; we are told that they included cavalry as well, and Kalanisi distinguishes between these relatively disciplined forces and the mere rabble "who had volunteered out of religious zeal".¹² Even more valuable is Kalanisi's information regarding the places of origin for this great host. He firstly mentions the armed bands and youths "of Damascus, the Ghuta, the Marj, and the outlying districts". Then he mentions the Nizari armed bands "from Hims and elsewhere, and from al-Aqaba, Qasr al-Hajjaj, and al-Shaghur, both footmen and horsemen fully armed".¹³ The last three places are suburban districts just south of Damascus, indicating that Bahram's preaching had won a response around the city as well as inside it. The reference to Hims is most precious, being a unique indication of Nizari activity in central Syria at this time.

The Nizaris' support of Tughtakin on this occasion was, however, a very costly gesture. Battle was joined at Tell as-Saqhab on 25 January 1126, and after initial success the Muslim army was routed by the famous massed charge of the Frankish knights. Kalanisi says that the Franks then "turned against all the footmen who were an immense number and put them to the sword until they made

12. Kalanisi, p.176.

13. Kalanisi, p.175.

an end of them".¹⁴ We have no means of assessing how serious a loss this was for the Syrian da'wa; for a minority movement, any loss is serious. Nonetheless, we may be sure that Bahram made much of this Nizari "sacrifice" in Tughtakin's service, and would be quick to remind him of it when asking for further favours.

To the Syrian da'wa, Aksunkur Il-Bursuki must have seemed an insuperable barrier to any revival of their activity in the north. Even more alarming, given his decidedly anti-Nizari attitude, was his growing amity with Tughtakin. The two amirs made plans for a grand campaign together against the Franks when Tughtakin visited Bursuki after his abortive siege of Atharib in August-September 1126. The Nizaris doubtless feared that Bursuki might try to change Tughtakin's lenient attitude towards them. But nothing came of this visit. Tughtakin fell ill and returned to Damascus. Further campaigning that year was unlikely, now that the brief Syrian autumn was at an end, so Bursuki appointed his able son Izz al-Din Masud as governor of Aleppo and set out for his capital, Mosul, to spend the winter there.¹⁵

14. Kalanisi, pp.176-7; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.372; Fulcher, III, 50, RHC. Occ., III, pp.477-8; William of Tyre, XIII, 18, trans. Babcock and Krey, II, pp.28-30; Sibti ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, pp.565-6 who follows Kalanisi but piously omits mention of the Nizaris' role.

15. Hamdan ibn Abd ar-Rahim, quoted in Kamal, Bughyat at-talab, RHC. Or., III, p.726; Kamal, Zubdat, RHC. Or., III, pp.653-4.

At Mosul, Bursuki was awaited by an unsuspected but long-prepared Nizari reception committee.

Bursuki arrived at Mosul on the morning of Friday 26 November 1126, perhaps having delayed his journey purposely so that his first public appearance would be at the midday service. He and his officers were still armed and dressed for travelling when they entered the Great Mosque.

As the ruler of the city and the Sultan's representative, it was Bursuki's privilege to take the Friday service. As he left his bodyguard to ascend the steps of the minbar, however, a group of men dressed as religious ascetics fell upon him, stabbing him repeatedly. Bursuki defended himself ably, managing to dispatch three of his assailants, but several of his officers and guards were wounded as they rushed to help him. All but one of the assassins were seized and held while Bursuki was carried to his palace. The congregation, needless to say, had fled in panic. When Bursuki died of his wounds later that afternoon, the assassins were tortured and executed, and the citizens displayed their grief and outrage by massacring about eighty people who just happened to be on the streets in the same Sufic garb that the assassins had worn.¹⁶

16. The most detailed version is that of the lost contemporary chronicle by Hamdan ibn Abd ar-Rahim, quoted in Kamal's Bughyat, RHC. Or., III, pp.726-7; Kalanisi, p.177, a brief notice (Gibb says he has omitted details of the assassination from his translation); the Anonymous Syriac Chronicle trans. by Tritton and Gibb, JRAS (1933), p.96; Matthew of Edessa, RHC. Arm., I, pp.145-6; Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.364-5, and RHC. Or., II, p.58; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.16; Bar Hebraeus, trans. E.A.W. Budge (Oxford, 1932), p.252; William of Tyre, XIII, 20, trans Babcock and Krey, II, pp.31-2.

According to the Saljuk historian Bundari, Bursuki was assassinated on the orders of the wazir Kiwam al-Din Nasir, a secret Nizari, in revenge for Bursuki's persecution of Nizaris in previous years.¹⁷ However, it is far more likely that this assassination was organized by the Syrian da'wa. From the first, suspicion fell on the Syrian Nizaris; Bursuki's son, Izz al-Din Masud, desperately wanted to lead a punitive expedition into Syria because he was convinced his father's murderers came from Hama.¹⁸ Ibn al-Athir names Sarmin as the place of origin for some of the fida'is,¹⁹ and we have striking evidence that at least one of them came from Aleppine territory.

A fragment from the otherwise lost contemporary chronicle of Hamdan ibn Abd ar-Rahim offers a fascinating postscript about the one assassin who got away. He was a lad from Kafr-Nasih, a village near Azaz, north of Aleppo. Our chronicler was told by an inhabitant of this village that the boy had an elderly mother who knew her son was one of the fida'is stalking Bursuki. When news came of his assassination and the death of all his assailants, she rejoiced and darkened her eyelids with antimony powder as if it were a festival. But when her son came home a few days later, her joy turned to sorrow and she shaved her hair and blackened her face as if in mourning.²⁰

17. Cited in Defrémery, p.410.

18. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.655.

19. Cited in Lewis, "The Ismā'īlites and the Assassins", the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.116; this point is omitted from the abridged Recueil version.

20. Kamal, Bughyat, RHC. Or., III, p.727.

If it is to be relied on, this is indeed a rare insight into the Nizari mentality. Whatever our prejudices, we must here acknowledge an astonishing group-spirit and supreme devotion to a cause.

Bursuki's assassination made a profound impression on the Syrian and Mesopotamian parts of the Muslim world. Not surprisingly, various colourful stories soon found currency, the best of which is preserved by several of our sources. The story goes that Bursuki had a dream the night before he was assassinated in which he was attacked and mortally wounded by a pack of dogs, three of whom he managed to kill while defending himself. When he spoke of this dream to his officers, they begged him not to appear in public for several days, but he insisted on his duty to lead the Friday prayer. When they remonstrated further, he opened the Kur'an at random in search of guidance and found the verse, "Allah's will must needs be done."²¹

Ibn al-Athir also tells us a much more credible and significant story about the aftermath of the murder. He says that when Izz al-Din Masud came to Mosul to be confirmed in his father's inheritance he ordered a thorough investigation of the affair, and his agents were able to trace the assassins to a house in the street of the cobblers. Its owner confessed under torture that he had sheltered these

21. Surat XXXIII, line 38; from the translation by N.J. Dawood, second edition (London, 1966); Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.654-5; Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.364-5, and II, p.58; Anonymous Syriac Chronicle trans. Tritton and Gibb, JRAS (1933) p.96. See also Hodgson, p.123 n.7.

Nizaris for several years while they studied Bursuki's movements and waited for the most opportune and public moment to strike.²² This is a precious insight into the fida'is' methods, if it is true, for the patience and devotion needed for such protracted stalking is remarkable. So too is the vehemence of the Sunnite response; the unfortunate cobbler was cruelly mutilated then stoned to death.

Bursuki's assassination was the Syrian da'wa's most striking achievement since Mawdud's assassination in 1113. It must have cheered the Persian Nizaris at Alamut, who in 1126 were again besieged in a renewed Saljuk counter-offensive led by the Sultan Mahmud and joined even by Sanjar who had shown surprising leniency towards them in previous years.²³ For the second time the Syrian Nizaris had removed the most powerful Turkish ruler west of Irak who owed allegiance to the Saljuks, and incidentally given the Franks of Antioch and Edessa an unexpected breathing space. Bursuki's alliance with Tughtakin had barely had time to show results, and if he had lived a little longer it is conceivable that the Latin states would have faced a threat at least comparable to that posed by Mawdud. Given Izz al-Din Masud's deep and violent hatred for all things Syrian, that alliance was now unlikely to be renewed.²⁴

The impression made on Tughtakin by Bursuki's untimely death

22. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.366.

23. See Hodgson, pp.100-102.

24. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.655.

is nowhere recorded, but he cannot have failed to remark on the Nizaris' capacity for efficient elimination. Perhaps it was caution bred of added fear after Bursuki's death, or perhaps Bahram had been reminding him of the Nizaris' sacrifice on his behalf at Tell as-Saqhab in January 1126, or something of both, which induced Tughtakin to grant the Nizaris at Damascus a very great favour before the year was out. Bahram asked for and was given what the da'wa had been working to obtain since its inception; a castle in which the Nizaris could establish an independent headquarters, free of all patronage and reliance on others.²⁵

The castle given to the Nizaris was Banyas (Qal'at Subeibe), and Bahram took up residence there sometime in November or December 1128. Once he was established, a large number of his followers joined him, we are told,²⁶ but he wisely retained the dar al-da'wa at Damascus, appointing a deputy to lead the brethren remaining there.²⁷

Banyas was a splendid acquisition. It was large and well-fortified, fully comparable in size with many of the castles being built by the crusaders in Palestine and the Transjordan. The

25. Kalanisi, p.180. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.367 says the wazir Mazdakani prevailed on Tughtakin to give the Nizaris Banyas.

26. Kalanisi, p.180, describing them in characteristically pious terms as a "rabble of varlets, half-wits, peasants, low fellows, and vile scum".

27. Defrémery, p.411; the deputy is not named.

castle itself occupied a high and extensive spur in the southern foothills of Mount Hermon. The village which shared its name lay some distance below in the valley.²⁸ The strategic importance of Banyas may be gathered from the frequent mention made of it in both Arabic and Latin sources for the crusades period. The main road from Damascus to the Mediterranean coast passed the foot of the castle, and Banyas had long been the major communications link between Tyre and Damascus.²⁹ With the advent of the crusaders, Banyas became a favourite stepping-off point for both Muslim and Crusader armies when campaigning against each other, and it was at Banyas that Tughtakin had anxiously followed the progress of the siege of Tyre.³⁰

Whoever held Banyas could in theory dominate the lowland stretching north from Lake Huleh, but in fact the Franks had occupied nearly all the territory around Banyas, and the castle was being increasingly threatened by them. Tughtakin very likely hoped that in appeasing the Nizaris by ceding the castle to them he would at the same time preoccupy them with some useful border defence for Damascus.³¹

28. For a ground plan and photograph of remains, see W. Müller-Wiener, Castles of the Crusaders (London, 1966), pp.45-6 and plate 22; see also the very different aspect of the photograph in R. Fedden, Syria and Lebanon (London, 1965), opposite p.164. Earlier views of the ruins before they were reduced by earthquakes and local vandals are available in Charles Wilson's Picturesque Palestine, Sinai, and Egypt (London, 1882?), II, pp.114, 116-117.

29. Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, RHC. Or., III, pp.545-6.

30. Kalanisi, p.171.

31. The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle, trans. Tritton and Gibb, JRAS (1933), pp.98-99 says he gave them Banyas because he could not hold the place himself.

From Banyas, Bahram sent out da'is in all directions, winning over "a great multitude" of peasant folk in the towns and villages of southern Syria.³² Extremist tactics of terror and intimidation spread further afield, and local rulers and magistrates are said to have feared supporting any opposition to the Nizaris, with the result that they could apparently commit crimes with impunity. This implies that the daggers of the Nizaris had again become busy. Their victims would have been too insignificant for notice by the chroniclers; local religious leaders, learned men and lawyers marked by their orthodoxy and their hatred for the sectaries.³³ "This public establishment of their cause created a grievous calamity and a public terror; men of learning, piety and religious authority were were distressed and none of them dared say a word about these people or complain about any man of them for they set about killing all those opposed to them and supporting all those who gave them assistance in their impious ways."³⁴

Besides propaganda and intimidation, the Nizaris now had military preoccupations as the owners of a major fortress. We are told that Bahram undertook a programme of repairs and rebuilding at Banyas to improve the defences,³⁵ and we may suspect that the Nizari militia was expanded and perhaps trained in the defensive

32. Kalanisi, p.187.

33. Quatremère, p.349.

34. Kalanisi, p.180.

35. Kalanisi, p.187.

skills of a fortress garrison. Being so exposed to Frankish possessions, the occupants of Banyas could not afford to be without an organized and equipped troop of cavalry, for scouting and retaliatory raiding.

As Damascus had been but a springboard for the acquisition of Banyas, so too Banyas was to be the means by which other fortresses would now be gained. In this respect - the implementation of the Persian Nizari pattern of interdependent strongpoints - Banyas was poorly placed. It was isolated, because there were scarcely any comparable sites in this area not already occupied by the Franks. The coastal ranges of the Lebanon were dominated if not already occupied by the barons of Tripoli and the coastal cities, and the high rolling hills of the Anti-Lebanon lacked fortresses. The nearest ideally-suitable area for the Persian Nizari strategy of fortress-seizure lay even further north, across the plain of the Buqai'ah.

Here lay the lower end of that wild and broken mountain backbone stretching southwards from Antioch between the Orontes and the coast. It was known in this period as the Jabal Bahra. The topography of the Jabal Bahra bore striking resemblance to the main areas of Nizari expansion in Persia. The barren ranges were deeply eroded into innumerable ravines and deep canyons. Each valley, each spur and hilltop, constituted a potentially closed area if defended by a fort or a tower. Travel through the area was difficult and slow on roads always tortuous and often impassable in winter.

Centralized control of the whole area was virtually impossible, and

many invaders before the crusaders had learned that the Jabal Bahra was a formidable obstacle to regular troops.³⁶

The crusaders had easily secured the coastal plain, and castles such as Hisn al-Akrad, Safita, Marqab, Kharibah and Barin (Montferrand) on its outskirts, but the core of the Jabal Bahra had remained inviolate, where a number of castles, great and small, sheltered tiny amirates such as the Banu'l-Amrun or the Banu Muhris and a crowd of independent petty warlords and brigands.

How he did it we shall probably never know, but we are told that Bahram obtained possession of Qadmus, the property of the Banu Muhris, sometime after he had established himself at Banyas.³⁷ It was sold to him by one Ibn al-Hirz, about whom nothing is known.³⁸ Qadmus was one of the most important of the central group of fortresses in the Jabal Bahra, but apparently it was not the only one taken by the Nizaris at this time. The sources clearly state that Bahram made himself master of several castles in the mountains.³⁹ It is striking that Qadmus is singled out for mention, just as Hims was noted by Kalanisi as a source of Nizari militia early in 1126. Though this is slender enough evidence, we have nothing more, and at the risk of being misled by the chance survival of these two

36. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.170.

37. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.383; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, pp.17-18; Quatremère, p.349; Defrémery, p.411.

38. Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.567.

39. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.383.

names, it would seem that Bahram's main area of expansion after the acquisition of Banyas was central Syria.

It is much to be regretted that so little is known of this very significant phase of expansion.⁴⁰

For two years, the Syrian da'wa grew in strength and confidence, but the year 1128 began ominously with the death on 11 February of the ruler of Damascus, Zahir al-Din Tughtakin. The Nizaris do not appear to have attached much significance to the event, for everything seemed to remain normal and prospects bright. Tughtakin's son and successor, Taj al-Muluk Buri, made it plain that he intended no departures from his father's policies. He confirmed all his father's officers in their posts, even increasing their salaries in some cases, and on the wazir Mazdakani he showered gifts, honours, and new sources of income. Reassured, Mazdakani maintained his protection and patronage of the Nizaris.⁴¹ All seemed well.

In fact, Buri was biding his time. Kalanisi tells us that he had observed the growing power of the sectaries under his father's

40. Which seems to have been overlooked since Defrémery questioned Athir's dating (p.411 n.2); the only objection offered is that Qadmus was taken "from the Muslims" in 1129 by Bohemond of Antioch. By this date, the da'wa had collapsed at Damascus and Banyas had been turned over to the Franks. I endeavour to show below (p.176) that the garrisons of the castles in the Jabal Bahra probably abandoned them sometime in 1128 to reinforce the badly depleted garrison at Banyas, so that Bohemond would logically have taken Qadmus from "Muslims" rather than "Batinis" in 1129.

41. Kalanisi, pp.183-4, 186-8.

calculated indulgence, and strongly disapproved of the wazir's open agreement with Bahram. Buri had, we are told, made a secret resolve about these dangerous and lawless fanatics, and was prepared to close his eyes, "with whatever pain", to their malevolent behaviour until the time was ripe to strike.⁴²

Buri's skilful dissimulation gave the Nizaris nothing to be alarmed at. They were doubtless relieved enough that there had been a change of ruler without a massacre. Feeling secure and confident, their activity redoubled; "their evil power . . . increased and the true nature of their false doctrine made manifest; their hands and tongues were lengthened with slander and abuse against the men of repute . . . and with greed and spoliation against lonely travellers on the highways, whom they seized with violence and used despitely, and with the slaying of men outrageously and unjustly."⁴³

Bahram's assurance was such that he chose this time to subdue by fear one of the most powerful families of the Wadi'l-Taim, a few miles north of Banyas. The Banu'l-Jandal were a small Muslim dynasty held in high esteem by their mixed Druze and Nusayri subjects. The head of the family, Dhahhak ibn Jandal, was locally renowned as a brave warrior, and it was through his younger brother Barak that Bahram tried to intimidate the family.

Kalanisi has the fullest account of this episode, but is

42. Kalanisi, pp.187-8.

43. Kalanisi, p.188.

plainly at a loss to explain Bahram's motivation. Barak had not hurt or opposed the Nizaris in any way warranting retribution, so Kalanisi simply awards Bahram a perverse desire to go against the law and the Kur'an.

It seems that Bahram lured the youth to Banyas on some pretext, then seized him, put him in fetters, and had him murdered in cold blood.⁴⁴ We have had occasion to observe earlier that the Nizaris rarely killed without a purpose.⁴⁵ In this case, we do not know whether the Banu'l-Jandal had offered open opposition to the Nizaris, but it is likely both that Bahram hoped for converts in the Wadi'l-Taim and that Nizari activity would be regarded by the Banu'l-Jandal as a threat to their delicately balanced ascendancy over these turbulent tribesmen. Barak's murder sounds like a carefully calculated warning of the consequences of opposition to the Nizari campaign rather than the first blow of a bid for territorial conquest. If Bahram had intended military conquest, he would scarcely have given advance notice, nor waited until the Banu'l-Jandal mustered forces for revenge. Either way, his action seems curiously foolhardy, because Kalanisi says the murderers were well-known and the death of such a handsome and gallant youth was everywhere lamented.⁴⁶

44. Kalanisi, p.189.

45. See Hodgson, pp.111-112.

46. Kalanisi, p.189. The suggestion of military conquest comes from Lewis, "The Ismā'īlites and the Assassins", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.116.

It was only after the outraged family had made a solemn pact of vengeance and gathered forces from the Wadi'l-Taim and from Damascus and other places that Bahram realized his calculated intimidation had backfired.⁴⁷

In a belated attempt to forestall the pending onslaught on Banyas, he hastily mustered all available Nizari soldiers and marched towards the Wadi'l-Taim. The Banu'l-Jandal were ready, however, with a force estimated at over a thousand.⁴⁸ They waited until the Nizari army had pitched camp for the night and was off its guard, then encircled it and swept down from all sides in an attack which achieved complete surprise. Bahram's scouting was gravely deficient. He was in his tent with his officers when the attack came, and like most of the Nizari soldiers scarcely had time to run to arms before being slaughtered by the men of the Wadi'l-Taim. Out of the whole Nizari force, only a handful escaped to bring news of the disaster to Banyas.⁴⁹

Bahram's body was chopped to pieces, and one enterprising peasant-soldier took the head, a hand and a ring and carried them to Egypt to present them to the Fatimid caliph, al-Amir. The soldier was congratulated and rewarded for his pains with a robe of honour and his grisly trophies were paraded through the streets

47. Kalanisi, pp.189-190; Quatremère, p.350.

48. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.383.

49. Kalanisi, p.190, giving A.H. 522 (ended 25 December 1128) but no month; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.383; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.18; Quatremère, pp.349-350; Defrémery, p.412.

of Cairo and Fustat.⁵⁰

The remaining Nizaris at Banyas and Damascus were almost as concerned at this outrageous behaviour by the Fatimid Caliph as they were at the very serious loss of their leader and nearly all their troops. They were very fortunate that the Banu'l-Jandal were content with vengeance and did not follow up their victory with an attack on Banyas, for the castle had been all but stripped of defenders. The gravity of the loss may be judged from Kalanisi who says that the Nizaris gathered at Banyas "from all provinces and districts . . ., all those of them who were scattered throughout the country."⁵¹ We have no direct evidence of the extent to which this reduced Nizari numbers in the areas of recent expansion, but it seems more than likely that the garrisons of the new castles in the Jabal Bahra would have been recalled to Banyas, and that Qadmus and other recent acquisitions reverted to local Muslims at this time.

The leadership of the da'wa had been provided for, however. Bahram had left one of his chief da'is as his deputy at Banyas when he set out for the Wadi'l-Taim, and this da'i, Isma'il al-^cAjami, now assumed headship of the Syrian da'wa.⁵² We have little with which to assess Isma'il as a leader, but Kalanisi observes that he "set about enticing the witless, exactly as Bahram had done, and

50. Kalanisi, pp.190-191; Quatremère, p.350.

51. Kalanisi, p.191.

52. Kalanisi, p.191; Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.383-4.

even surpassed him in folly . . ."⁵³ Isma'il lost no time in resuming the preaching campaign, for he began sending out da'is from Banyas almost at once.⁵⁴

The Nizari following at Damascus appears to have remained more or less intact through the crisis of 1128, for the wazir Mazdakani soon wrote to Isma'il assuring him of the same support and protection that he had extended to Bahram.⁵⁵ It is not impossible that Isma'il had in fact been the leading da'i in Damascus before being called to take care of Banyas, because we are also told that the wazir appointed a new leader for the Damascus Nizaris at this time; one Abu'l-Wafa. The choice was evidently a wise one, for under Abu'l-Wafa's energetic leadership the Nizari following increased substantially in the year following Bahram's death. Some of this may be accounted for by Nizari refugees from outlying areas no longer protected by Bahram's militia, but Abu'l-Wafa's personal reputation grew remarkably, until the common people thought him more powerful than Buri himself.⁵⁶

The crisis of 1128 had not, therefore, seriously undermined the da'wa as a whole. With new leaders and the continued support of the wazir, the Nizaris began 1129 full of vigour, working hard to make up their losses. Once again, Kalanisi has occasion to observe that

53. Kalanisi, p.191.

54. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.384.

55. Kalanisi, p.191; Quatremère, p.350.

56. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.384; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.18; Quatremère, p.350; Defrémery, p.413.

"the complaints of the people, men of rank and commons alike, continued to multiply, and their losses at the hands of the deluded fanatics to succeed one another".⁵⁷

The da'wa had unquestionably been weakened however, and the Nizaris did not lack adversaries who now pressed Buri for prompt action before they recovered strength again. The two men who most strongly urged this upon Buri were the ra'is, Thiqat al-Mulk ibn al-Sufi, and the military governor, Yusuf ibn Firuz. They were not motivated entirely by a pious desire to curb the excesses of the sectaries; both were political adversaries of the wazir Mazdakani and saw an opportunity to be rid of him at the same time as removing his dangerous supporters. Buri seems to have taken some time to be persuaded to action, but at last it was agreed that he should arrange for the wazir to be murdered and that this would be the signal for the ahdath and the mob to be let loose on the Nizaris.⁵⁸ What finally prompted Buri to action is nowhere stated, but one source suggests that he was deeply resentful of the Nizari acquisition of Qadmus because he desired that castle for himself. We know that the Franks of Antioch took Qadmus sometime during 1129. Since he was in no position to work off his pique on the Franks themselves, this may have been the final straw which provoked Buri to destroy the Nizaris.⁵⁹

57. Kalanisi, p.191.

58. Kalanisi, pp.193-4; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.384.

59. Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.567.

The date was set for Wednesday 4 September 1129. The wazir Mazdakani attended council with all the other officers of state as was usual, in the Rose Pavilion at the Palace. When the meeting ended, the other officials left the Pavilion in ascending order of rank so that the wazir, as the most senior government official, was last to leave. Buri gave a prearranged signal to one of his bodyguards, and the wazir was struck down and decapitated. His head and body were thrown on the ashheap at the Iron gate.

At this, the ahdath and the rabble of the city, armed by the Banu'l-Sufi, set to work. They spread swiftly throughout the city, slaughtering all Nizaris they encountered, and sacking all known Nizari dwelling places. The occupants were dragged out and butchered, regardless of sex or age, in what must have been an unimaginably frightful bloodbath. Nobody interceded for any of the victims, for fear of the vengeance of the inflamed ahdath; the roles of violence were truly reversed now. Persons known to have sheltered with the Nizaris were also slaughtered, and we may suspect that many non-Nizaris died as old scores were settled in the general carnage and confusion. The Nizari dar al-da^cwa was of course the first main target for the mob, and those who resisted are said to have been tortured most cruelly.

Something of the depth of pent-up Damascene hatred may be gathered from the example of a woman whose husband and daughter had associated with the Nizaris; she killed them both and hung their heads in the doorway as a sign of her zeal. Kalanisi names only one

of the victims, the freedman Shahdi, whom he describes as a former pupil of Abu Tahir, the former chief da'i at Aleppo. Kalanisi accuses Shahdi of a major share in causing trouble in Damascus; he was one of the many Nizaris who were crucified on the battlements of the citadel.

Estimates of the total slain vary considerably, from 6,000 to 20,000, and even allowing for the enthusiastic exaggeration of the chroniclers, several thousand appear to have perished that Wednesday.⁶⁰

There is no mention of preliminary arrests, as there were in Aleppo in 1114, which might have given warning of what was to come. The massacre appears to have been swift and complete, for there is a remarkable silence in all the sources as regards survivors.

News soon reached Banyas, where Isma'il's immediate fear was probably that troops were coming from Damascus to seize the castle and slaughter its occupants. His decision was prompt. Perhaps he was low in provisions as well as manpower; whatever the reason, he judged his position to be untenable and sent word to Baldwin II at

60. Kalanisi, pp.192-3, probably an eyewitness account, which forms the basis of all subsequent versions (Gibb's translation may be somewhat abridged); Athir, RHC. Or., I, pp.384-5 who gives 6,000; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, RHC. Or., III, p.567 (the Recueil translation gives his estimate as 20,000; Lewis, "The Ismā'īlites and the Assassins", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.117 says Sibṭ has 10,000); the anonymous Bustan (Arabic text, edited by Cahen, p.21), cited by Lewis in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.117, which estimates 20,000; Bar. Hebraeus trans. Budge, p.254; Quatremère, pp.350-1; Defrémery, pp.413-4, citing among others Abu'l-Mahasin, whose account is omitted in the Recueil version of his chronicle.

Jerusalem, offering to hand over the castle in return for asylum for himself and his followers. It was the most practical way to preserve something on which the da'wa could be rebuilt. Baldwin gladly accepted the offer, and had no reason to delay sending a troop to secure the castle, so we may assume that it was only a short while before Isma'il and his companions "slunk away from Banyas into the Frankish territories".⁶¹

Such a magnificent windfall must have seemed to the Franks divine confirmation of their plans for a campaign against Damascus. As soon as Tughtakin died, envoys had been sent to Europe to gather troops for this campaign, and these reinforcements were now arriving. Swelled by troops from Tripoli, Antioch, and Edessa, it was a vast host which gathered at Banyas in October 1129 and moved out to encamp before Damascus early in November. The Franks refused, however, to be drawn into combat because they lacked provisions and pack animals for a prolonged siege. A large part of the army was sent into the Hauran to gather supplies but got out of hand and was virtually annihilated by Buri's alert and well-informed cavalry. Without the expected supplies, and with such a serious loss of manpower, Baldwin had to abandon camp, and withdraw hastily to Banyas just as the winter rains set in.⁶²

61. Kalanisi, p.194; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.385; William of Tyre, XIV, 19, trans. Babcock and Krey, II, p.77.

62. Kalanisi, pp.197-9; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, pp.567-8; William of Tyre, XIII, 26, trans. Babcock and Krey, II, pp.40-43.

This campaign seems to have inspired a colourful but quite uncorroborated explanation for the Nizari massacre which more than one modern historian has accepted at face value.⁶³ The story has it that the Franks were encouraged to attack Damascus when the wazir Mazdakani secretly offered to open the gates of the city in exchange for the seaport of Tyre. The Franks were to present themselves one Friday, and occupy the city while the populace, at mid-day prayer in the Great Mosque, were confined therein by the Nizaris. The plot supposedly reached the ears of Buri who then had the wazir murdered and the Nizaris massacred.⁶⁴

Athir's story seems highly improbable. The Franks had only recently captured Tyre after a long and costly siege, and part of the city had been ceded to the Venetians in return for their assistance. It is inconceivable that Baldwin would agree to hand over such a vital stronghold to a band of dangerous sectaries feared and distrusted by Christians and Muslims alike, and it would be extremely naïve of Mazdakani and the Nizaris to think that he would. Kalanisi was well-placed to know the truth. If such a plot had existed, he would have been glad to reveal the full extent of Nizari involvement. The story may have originated as idle gossip or perhaps as a

63. The most recent example being R.L. Nicholson, "The Growth of the Latin States, 1118-1144", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, pp.430-431.

64. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.384; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.18, who has the Nizari leader Abu'l-Wafa negotiating with the Franks, and telescopes about two months to have the Franks appear at Damascus the day after the massacre.

justification for their removal of the wazir put about by the Banu'l-Sufi.⁶⁵

The 1129 massacre at Damascus and the subsequent loss of Banyas very nearly destroyed the Syrian da'wa. It is impossible to estimate what indigenous elements may have remained in places like Hims or the Jabal Bahra, or even older areas such as the Jazr and Jabal Summak. Many of these people may have migrated to Damascus after Bahram's death and perished in the massacre, and we cannot overlook the possibility of unrecorded local massacres inspired by the main one at Damascus. But it is likely that some remnants remained in central Syria, and to these the refugees from Banyas doubtless hastened. We do not know whether this group was a small garrison or a host of several hundred, but it is unlikely that they would be welcomed or encouraged to settle in Latin territory.⁶⁷

A movement of Nizari refugees northwards to more sympathetic areas would have been hastened by the final blow to strike the da'wa in December or early January 1129-30. The chief da'i Isma'il fell ill and died of dysentery, and was fittingly laid to rest beside the castle which had so recently symbolized the most splended achievement of the Syrian da'wa.⁶⁸

65. H.A.R. Gibb refuted Athir's tale years ago in "Notes on the Arabic Materials for the History of the Early Crusades", BSOS, VII (1935), pp.751-2. It is significant that Mazdakani's successor was none other than Tiqat al-Mulk ibn al-Sufi. (Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, RHC. Or., III, p.568.)

67. See William of Tyre's comments, XIV, 19, trans. Babcock and Krey, II, p.77.

68. Kalanisi, p.194.

CHAPTER VII
ESTABLISHMENT IN THE JABAL BAHRA

The reputation of the da'wa outside Syria does not appear to have been much tarnished by the catastrophe of 1129. In the very next year, A.H. 524 (December, 1129 - December, 1130) we hear of an interesting episode concerning a diplomatic mission to Egypt by one Hamdan ibn Abd ar-Rahim, a scholar and notable of Ma'arrat al-Nu'man in the service of the ruler of Aleppo. At Cairo, the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir was only reluctantly dissuaded from the conviction that Hamdan was a secret Nizari. He had assumed, the Nizaris having expanded so greatly in that area over the past thirty years, that anyone coming from there was necessarily a Nizari.¹ Though the Caliph was mistaken, his anxiety suggests that the Fatimids were still concerned by the Nizari schism and its potential threat to their security. Their fear was well-founded, as we shall soon see. For the moment however, mention of the ruler of Aleppo recalls us to consider what prospects existed for a Nizari recovery there after the debacle in the south.

The main consequence of Bursuki's assassination for Aleppo and the north had been two more years of chronic instability.² His successor Izz al-Din Masud had appointed a governor named Tuman, but

1. Cahen, *Syrie du Nord*, p.42; citing in MS Kamal's Bughyat, Ibn Asakir, and Ibn Muyassar, A.H. 524; see also Hodgson, p.70.

2. J. Sauvaget, article "Ḥalab", EI2, iii, p.87.

he proved as ineffectual and self-seeking as his three rivals for control of the city. In a confused tangle of coups and counter-coups, in which the citizens played no small part, Aleppo passed from Tuman to the Sultan's envoy Kutlugh, to Il-Ghazi's son Badr al-Dawla Sulaiman, then to Ridwan's son Ibrahim. To complete the city's misery, it was subjected to a harsh blockade by the Franks of Antioch from October to December, 1127.³

Aleppo's weakness alarmed the governor of Ja'bar, who sent word to the new atabeg at Mosul, the Sultan's replacement for Izz al-Din Masud who had died suddenly. This was the ruthless and energetic Imad al-Din Zanki, who sent a force to relieve the siege and restore order, but in reality as well to secure the place to his control. He made his own triumphal entry on 18 June 1128.⁴

While the Nizaris at Damascus and Banyas were suffering the worst reverses of their da'wa's history, Zanki had begun consolidating his power in and around Aleppo. In September 1129 he received the submission of Hama, but was unsuccessful in his siege of Hims. Nonetheless, he imposed his authority over most of the territory stretching between Aleppo and Hama,⁵ which included many of the

3. Kalanisi, pp.182-3; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.655-656.

4. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.656-7; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.306-7.

5. Kalanisi, pp.200-202; Kamal, RHC. Or., III, pp.658-660, whose dates are advanced by one year for these events; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.380; William of Tyre, XIII, 27, trans. Babcock and Krey, II, pp.43-4; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.348.

areas where the Nizaris had won significant support in Ridwan's reign.

Bursuki's control of Aleppo, as we observed earlier, seriously inhibited any further Nizari prospects at Aleppo. Zanki's rule was to have precisely the same effect. Zanki was as zealous a Sunnite as any of the Mesopotamian amirs, yet his primary ambition in extending his power into Syria was not, as Ibn al-Athir seeks to portray, to wage holy war against the Franks. Zanki's major campaigns in Syria were directed against other Muslims, against Hims and Damascus. He was intent on the creation of a strong principality based equally on Mosul and Aleppo. There was no place in Zanki's well-ordered state for dissident or potentially disruptive elements such as the Nizaris.⁶

The circumstances which had originally enabled the Nizaris to establish themselves at Aleppo were not likely to reappear so long as Zanki ruled there; "l'anarchie en Syrie du Nord ne devait plus réapparaître".⁷ Of the two main areas to which refugees from Banyas may have fled, the districts of Aleppo and the Jabal Bahra, the latter seems now to have been their likeliest choice. The Jazr and Jabal Summak were so closely tied to Aleppo that Zanki's power would always threaten annihilation on any open recovery there. The Jabal Bahra was sufficiently remote from the centres of Muslim

6. On Zanki see H.A.R. Gibb, "Zengi and the Fall of Edessa" in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, pp.449-462. See also Stevenson, pp.121-4.

7. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.307.

and Latin power in Syria to provide both a safe refuge and a favourable place for consolidation and even expansion.

There are, then, reasonable grounds for assuming that what was left of the Syrian da'wa became concentrated in the Jabal Bahra.⁸ Nonetheless, it would appear that for a time the da'wa was numbed disorganised. Only two items of Nizari activity are reported in the years immediately following the 1129 reverses, and both of them seem to be attributable to Alamut.

On 5 October 1130 the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir was assassinated in the course of a journey between Cairo and one of his many pleasure palaces across the Nile. The number of his assailants is variously given as nine or ten, and they were positively identified as partisans of his uncle Nizar.⁹ There is nothing to indicate precisely where the assassins came from, however. Though Syria was closest, and the Nizaris there had ample provocation after the 1123 exchange at Damascus and al-Amir's reception of Bahram's relics in 1128, the false imam-Caliph of the Fatimids would always have been a long-term target for the parent da'wa at Alamut. In view of the

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8. There is a misprint in Lewis, "The Ismā'īlites and the Assassins", the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.119 which describes this area as being north-west of Aleppo; the error is corrected in Lewis, Assassins, p.108.
9. Gibb's version of Kalanisi has no mention of this episode; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.390; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.19; The Recueil versions of Ibn Muyassar and Abu'l-Mahasin also omit al-Amir's assassination. For full references, see Lewis "The Ismā'īlites and the Assassins", the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, pp.118-119.

dislocation of the Syrian da'wa and its regrouping in the north, it seems more credible to regard al-Amir's assassination either as a long-range mission from Persia or perhaps as a completely indigenous Egyptian affair. We are told that the ordinary people rejoiced to hear of al-Amir's death,¹⁰ and it is possible that Nizari partisans were protected and encouraged by al-Amir's enemies. Perhaps the most persuasive argument against this being a mission by the Syrian da'wa is suggested by the second item of Nizari activity, the attempt on Buri in 1131. If the Syrian da'wa was incapable by itself of taking vengeance on the perpetrator of the 1129 massacre, how much less capable was it of penetrating the Fatimid security screen to eliminate the spiritual leader of Musta'lian Isma'ilism?

Kalanisi has a surprisingly circumstantial account of the attempt on Buri's life. He relates how Yusuf ibn Firuz and Thiqat al-Mulk ibn al-Sufi feared Nizari vengeance after 1129 and adopted elaborate precautions, wearing heavy armour and surrounding themselves with large numbers of armed bodyguards. It is evident that people considered the Syrian Nizaris crushed beyond all hope of recovery, for vengeance was feared not from Syria but from Alamut, which Kalanisi accurately describes as "the centre of the Batiniyya".¹¹ He has an imaginative reconstruction of the arrival at Alamut of news of the da'wa's collapse at Damascus and the selection of two Khurasanian fida'is to go there and devise means of eliminating Buri.

10. Defremery, pp.415-6.

11. Kalanisi, p.194.

This proved easier than expected, because Buri's personal bodyguards were mostly Khurasanis, and the two fida'is found old acquaintances among them who vouched for them and had them admitted to the troop on a regular allowance. Kalanisi notes that they had come wearing appropriately Turkish garb, and their countrymen had no suspicion of their real intentions. Because they had been recommended, they were regarded as being completely trustworthy.

Their chosen moment to strike came on 7 May 1131, not quite two years after the massacre. The two fida'is may have been waiting some time, for we are not told when they were sent from Alamut or when they arrived in Damascus. Buri was returning to the citadel on horseback from a visit to a bath-house in the city, escorted by his Khurasani and Daylamite cavalry. Once inside the citadel, the escort disbanded at the gate of Buri's palace, all but the two Nizaris, who leapt on Buri just as he was preparing to dismount. Though he sustained a flesh-wound at the neck and a deep knife wound in his flank, Buri flung himself from his horse and managed to escape to safety. The escort at once returned and seized the assassins. Buri was taken to have his wounds sewn up.¹²

Alamut's vengeance for the massacre of the Syrian da'wa at Damascus seemed to have been bungled, for Buri survived and in the weeks that followed resumed his normal duties, riding with his 'askar

12. Kalanisi, pp.202-203.

and holding audiences for his officers and ministers.¹³ But the wound in his side refused to heal and his strength began to ebb. Just three weeks after the attempt, he had his eldest son Abu'l-Fath Isma'il formally invested as his successor in case he succumbed to his injury.¹⁴ Buri surprisingly survived for almost a year longer, but he grew more and more feeble and finally wasted away, dying on 7 June 1132.¹⁵

Just as the assassination of Ibn Khashshab at Aleppo in 1125 seemed to signal the final end of Nizari influence there, so too Buri's death closes the Damascene phase of Nizari activity in Syria. The sectaries never reappeared there in sufficient numbers to warrant notice by any chronicler.

In the year following Buri's death, we have our first clear indication that the da'wa was recovering from its near extinction. By an odd coincidence, at about the same time that Buri's successor Isma'il was recovering from the Franks "the castle of Banyas which

13. Kalanisi, p.204.

14. Kalanisi, pp.206-7.

15. Kalanisi, pp.208-9; Gibb has 6 June, but we are told that Buri died in the first hour of 21 Rajab 526 (8 June) which would be the evening of Sunday 7 June. (See Stevenson, Appendix A, pp.358-9 for a discussion of the discrepancies between observed dates and calendar dates in the Arabic sources.) Ibn Asakir, quoted in Abu'l-Mahasin, RHC. Or., III, pp.501-2; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.393; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, pp.19-20; Anonymous Syriac Chronicle, trans. Tritton and Gibb, JRAS (1933), p.273; Defrémery, p.416.

had been given to them by the Isma'ilis",¹⁶ the Nizaris regained possession of Qadmus, which they had occupied briefly before Bahram's death in 1128. It was not seized, either by assault or stratagem; they bought it.

Qadmus was sold to the Nizaris by the lord of al-Khaf, Saif al-Mulk ibn 'Amrun, who had recovered it only a year before from some mountain folk. They had apparently seized it from its small Frankish garrison in the uncertain months following the death of Bohemond II of Antioch.¹⁷ The Nizari to whom the castle was handed over is named as Abu'l-Fath.¹⁸ Kamal describes him simply as a missionary. Whether he was the chief da'i at this time or not, we have no means of determining.

Kamal seems to offer a clue to a more precise dating for the occupation of Qadmus; he says that the lord of Qadmus then went to Antioch to raise an army against Sawar. This was the campaign which culminated in the battle of Kinnasrin. However, it has been pointed out that Kamal here copies an error from Al-Azimi, and the entry should read al-Kuds (Jerusalem) instead of Qadmus. In any case, the

16. Ibn Asakir, quoted in Kamal, Bughyat, RHC. Or., III, p.696.

17. Kamal, RHC. Or., III, p.665, under A.H. 526 (1131-2), but just prior to an entry for January, 1134; other sources are agreed on A.H. 527; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.400; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.21; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.353; Defrémery, p.417. Hodgson, p.106, suggests that the mountain folk may have been Nuysayris, but gives no references.

18. Not to be confused with the Abu'l-Fath of Sarmin who died at Afamiya in 1106. The name was a common one; Buri's son and successor was named Abu'l-Fath Isma'il.

sources are at such variance as to the date of Kinnasrin that we are safer to keep to the generalized dating of the Muslim year; late 1132 or early 1133.¹⁹

Saif al-Din's reason for selling Qadmus was probably quite simply that he could not afford the manpower or the expense of maintaining a second castle.²⁰ As was observed earlier, the Jabal Bahra was not normally a scene of fierce competition for possession of fortresses, and Qadmus was one of the more remote castles in the area. It had a very lofty site, with splendid views, but it was awkward of access and not easy to maintain.²¹

It is suggestive of the da'wa's dislocation after 1129 that three years have elapsed before we hear anything directly concerning the Syrian Nizaris. After the Aleppo debacle in 1114, an assault was made on Shaizar in less than three months.

Our only hint of the da'wa's activity after it had obtained Qadmus comes from Athir, who says that the Nizaris established themselves there and began to harass both Muslims and Franks, "with whom they were continually at war", so that Qadmus became a nuisance to other nearby castles.²² We could reasonably expect suspicion and hostility to characterize Nizari attitudes towards their neighbours,

19. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.353 n.22; for a useful summary of the conflicting evidence over Kinnasrin, see the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.434 n.1.

20. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.353.

21. Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.174.

22. Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.400.

and this was probably reciprocated, but we are at liberty to doubt whether the da'wa had the strength or the foolishness to pick trouble deliberately at this time.

In point of fact, it is impossible to guess how strong the da'wa was by this time. Whether it had achieved a remarkable recovery or was still struggling to piece itself together. But one fact is plain enough. Qadmus was the first of the Nizaris' permanent acquisitions in Syria. The da'wa had at last entered on its final phase of establishment.

Exciting as this may sound, regrettably little can be said about it. We know more about each one of the da'wa's first three decades than all of the next three decades put together. The chroniclers seem almost to have lost interest in the sectaries. Entries become very brief and so scattered that it is impossible to draw from them any coherent thread of development. This may reflect a general conviction that the movement in Syria had finally been subdued and was not worthy of anything more than the briefest notice, but it more probably reflects the Nizaris' new isolation.

At Aleppo and Damascus they had been in full view of the chroniclers, but the Jabal Bahra was more like a neglected island around which the conflict between Christians and Muslims ebbed and flowed, by-passed by the main stream of affairs. In addition to this, it is possible that the Nizaris now chose to be more discreet and cautious about displays of strength, profiting from the lessons of Aleppo and Damascus. Consolidation and survival took precedence

for the moment over expansion of numbers, and survival could only be guaranteed by the possession of sturdy fortresses.

What little we hear of the Nizaris in the next few decades is almost entirely concerned with fortresses. We lack even a handful of those precious retrospective glimpses, so useful in reconstructing the da'wa's history hitherto. We are therefore left with the firm impression of a campaign solely to seize fortresses. There is no mention of the preaching campaign, though we may be sure this continued, and there is no mention of tactical assassination in these years.

Several years elapse before we again hear of the Nizaris in the Jabal Bahra, this time when the little fortress of al-Khaf is ceded to them by Saif al-Mulk ibn Amrun's son Musa in the course of a succession struggle with his cousins after his father's sudden death in 1135. No further details are given.²³ Kamal notices this young prince a few years later, when he was captured by Sawar, as the governor of al-Khaf who sold it to the Batinis.²⁴ The castle was doubtless a welcome acquisition for the da'wa, there having been no risk or cost of manpower involved, but al-Khaf was as isolated and remote as Qadmus. It was famous for its adjoining cavern, whose only access was by a tunnel.²⁵

23. Cahen, *Syrie du Nord*, p.353, citing al-Azimi and Nuwairi.

24. Kamal, *RHC. Or.*, III, p.680, A.H. 533 (1138-9).

25. Cahen, *Syrie du Nord*, p.174.

Our next notice of the Nizaris occurs in 1137, and finds them again interested in a small castle, this time Khariba. Being in Frankish hands, they could not expect to buy the place, and an assault was necessary. Fortunately for them, the garrison was depleted and once the Nizaris had found a means of entry they had no difficulty in slaughtering the defenders.²⁶ Their tenure was brief, however. In March or April, shortly after the Nizari assault, the governor of Hama, Ibn Salah, captured Khariba while raiding in that area.²⁷ The fate of the Nizaris is not recorded, but Ibn Salah was then replaced as ruler of Hama by Zanki's lieutenant, Salah al-Din al-Yaghi Siyani, who installed his own governor at Khariba, al-Hajib Isa. It was from this governor that Khariba was restored to the Nizaris by a stratagem which finally amounted to outright purchase.

There was no regular garrison at Khariba, only al-Hajib Isa, his son, a servant, and a gateman, and the only access was by a wooden ladder. The gateman had a friend, one Ibn al-Marji, who occasionally came to visit him at the castle. Ibn al-Marji must have known of the Nizari attempt a few months before, and saw an opportunity for personal profit. We are told that he conferred with the Nizaris, who agreed to give him a sum of money and a plot of land if he could deliver the castle to them. Ibn al-Marji then presented himself at the castle and was admitted by his unsuspecting friend. Starting with this unfortunate, Ibn al-Marji murdered all the occupants and delivered the place to the waiting Nizaris, who, we

26. Ibn al-Furat, cited in Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.175, 354.

27. Kalanisi, p.241.

are told, fulfilled their part of the bargain.²⁸

Khariba was followed a few years later by the most important Nizari acquisition in the Jabal Bahra. Masyaf was acquired by the same subterfuge as that employed at Afamiya in 1106. The castle belonged to the Banu Munkidh, whose head Izz al-Din Abu'l-Asakir had bought it from the Mirdasid Nasir al-Din Sabak in A.H. 521 (1127).²⁹ The Banu Munkidh had later appointed one of their mamluks, the chamberlain Sunkur, as their governor at Masyaf. The Nizaris apparently ingratiated themselves with this officer and fostered in him what Athir calls a false sense of confidence, until he allowed them free access to the castle and his presence. He soon reaped the consequences of this foolishness. The Nizaris chose their moment, killed Sunkur, and seized the castle for themselves.³⁰

Masyaf was later to become the headquarters of the Syrian da'wa, and remained in Nizari hands until 1270.³¹ Its site was nowhere near as splendid as that of Qadmus, but Masyaf was larger, stronger,

28. Usamah ibn Munkidh, trans. P.K. Hitti, Memoirs of an Arab-Syrian Gentleman (New York, 1929), pp.107-108, where the variant spelling al-Khirbah is adopted.

29. Quatremère, p.340.

30. Kalanisi, p.263, a very brief notice; in A.H. 535 (August 1140 to August 1141) following a report of a cavalry clash at Ascalon in April-May 1141; Athir, RHC. Or., I, p.438; Abu'l-Fida, RHC. Or., I, p.25; Quatremère, p.341; Defrémery, pp.417-8.

31. The traveller Benjamin of Tudela reports in 1163 that the Nizari "capital" was still at Qadmus. (Trans. in T. Wright (ed.), Early Travels in Palestine (London, 1848) p.78.)

and better placed strategically. It sat at the mouth of a valley on the eastern slopes of the Jabal Bahra within a day's march of Hama. It controlled the road between Hama and Marqab, perhaps the most important of the tortuous routes through these mountains.³² The castle itself was built on a low rock outcrop, almost on the same level as the village, but Masyaf made surprisingly effective use of its site. It was protected on two sides by impenetrable marshes, and the compactness of the fortress concealed the fact that there were no fewer than three successive outworks or lines of defence. The walls abounded in towers, of all sizes and shapes. Though architecturally a bizarre patchwork of styles and building techniques, Masyaf was a powerful acquisition for the da'wa.³³

With the occupation of Masyaf, the subject of this thesis properly draws to a close. Masyaf crowned the basic pattern of Nizari possessions in the Jabal Bahra, and with Qadmus was to be its enduring mainstay. Other fortresses were acquired over the next twenty years, but these merely added to the central core already established, and we do not know when or how most of them were acquired. Various lists are offered purporting to outline Nizari possessions in the time of the chief da'i Rashid al-Din Sinan (1162-1193), which offer the names of Khawabi, al-Munifah, Rusafah, al-^cUllaiqah,

32. Quatremère, p.340; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, p.174.

33. Defrémery, p.418, quoting Burckhardt's 1812 description; see also T.S.R. Boase, Castles and Churches of the Crusading Kingdom (London, 1967), pp.75-76; W. Müller-Wiener, Castles of the Crusaders (London, 1966), pp.68-9 and Plate 95.

al-Qulai'ah, and Maniqa.³⁴

At the end of the decade in which Masyaf was obtained the da'wa had recovered strength sufficiently to make an alliance with Raymond II of Antioch against Nur al-Din, and to contribute a force of cavalry under the command of the Kurd 'Ali ibn Wafa.³⁵ In that same year, the da'wa also obtained its revenge on Bahram's adversary, Dhahhak ibn Jandal, by assassination, though we have nothing more than this terse statement.³⁶ With the assassination of Raymond of Tripoli in 1152,³⁷ and military action against the Franks at Shaizar after the citadel was wrecked by an earthquake in 1157,³⁸ the da'wa seems to be thoroughly re-established. These are our only notices of Nizari activity in Syria at this time.

By the time Rashid al-Din Sinan takes over from Abu Muhammad

34. Makrizi, cited in Quatremère, p.341; see also Defrémery, pp. 419-420; Guyard, "Un Grand Maître des Assassins au temps de Saladin", JA, 7e série, IX (1877), p.351; G. Le Strange, Palestine Under the Moslems (London, 1890) p.352 quoting the list and descriptions of Dimashki; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.175-6, 354; Hodgson, p.187.

35. Destroyed with Raymond at Inab on 28 June 1149. See Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.383-4, citing Ibn al-Furat, and Kalanisi, pp.290-292.

36. Kalanisi, not in Gibb's version, but in the Arabic edition of Amedroz, p.303, cited in Lewis, "The Ismā'ilites and the Assassins", in the Pennsylvania History of the Crusades, I, p.120.

37. William of Tyre, XVII, 19, trans. Babcock and Krey, II, p.214; Ibn al-Furat, cited in Defrémery, p.421.

38. Kalanisi, p.342; William of Tyre, XVIII, 18, trans. Babcock and Krey, II, pp.266-8; Cahen, Syrie du Nord, pp.397-8.

as chief da^ci, sometime about 1162, the phase of establishment is clearly at an end, and gives way to consolidation and piecemeal expansion within the Jabal Bahra. After nearly half a century of struggle, of near successes and disastrous reverses, the Syrian da^cwa had assumed the form it was to retain for more than a century; like its Persian parent, a not insignificant territorial state, a heterodox retreat on the outskirts of the Muslim world.

CONCLUSION

The stated purpose of this thesis was an examination of the early history of the Nizaris in Syria in order to find out why they took so long to establish themselves permanently. The significance of the Nizaris in Twelfth Century Syria has not been overlooked, but a study as brief and incompletely documented as this cannot hope to offer more than a few incidental observations on the importance of their role between Muslims and Crusaders. The main business of this conclusion is to show the way in which the Persian da'is sent into Syria had to reformulate Persian Nizari techniques of expansion to meet the different opportunities and obstacles of a new area. It is the contention of this thesis that a large part of the da'wa's delay in getting established derives from the nature of the policy finally adopted.

Syria shared with Persia favourable prospects for the Nizari campaign. There were strong indigenous Isma'ili elements in northern Syria in a setting of extreme social and political fragmentation. However, the Nizari da'is found at Aleppo an opportunity that was almost inconceivable in Persia or Irak; a local Saljuk prince so desperately in need of allies that he was prepared to offer the Nizaris protection in return for their support. Ironically, techniques of terror and assassination which in Persia were dedicated to the overthrow of Saljuk power were in Syria initially turned to cultivate the da'wa's alliance with its Saljuk patron.

The leaders of the Syrian da'wa, as the emissaries of Alamut,

would be deeply imbued with notions of seizing fortresses to serve as defensible refuges and local centres for the Nizari campaign. They would regard the alliance with Ridwan as a strictly temporary expedient, an exceptional stroke of luck which would shelter the da'wa while it grew sufficiently to be able to seize castles for itself.

Unfortunately, the Nizaris' first major attempt at securing a suitable stronghold, Afamiya, met with defeat and considerable loss of manpower. The da'wa clearly had the ingenuity to gain possession of castles, but lacked the strength of numbers and resources to hold them.

The reason for this was plain. Defeat came not from Muslim neighbours but from the crusader principality of Antioch. The recurrent conflict between Crusaders and Muslims, which had contributed in no small measure to the conditions of distress and dislocation favouring the Nizari campaign, made territorial acquisitions far more difficult in Syria than in Persia. Castles in Syria were at a premium, already marked down as the prizes in a much greater struggle. The Nizaris could not hope to compete on equal terms in the fierce competition between forces far larger and better equipped for siege warfare than they. This was the paradox of the Nizari campaign in Syria; it was easier to gain a large following than castles to shelter it. Apparently it was this consideration which made the alliance with Ridwan into something more than a temporary expedient. At the time of the attempt on Afamiya, the Nizaris had

enjoyed his protection for somewhat more than six years. After Afamiya, we hear of no further full-scale assaults on fortresses; the brief Isma'ili occupation of Kafarlata in 1110 seems to have been on Ridwan's behalf, and even at Afamiya, the citadel was taken in Ridwan's name. For the remaining seven years of Ridwan's reign after Afamiya, the da'wa appears to concentrate on preserving the alliance and cultivating Ridwan's favour.

What had been adopted initially as a temporary expedient, simply the most efficient use of an unusually good opportunity, seems gradually to have hardened into something approaching a policy. What had begun as a means to an end now became an end in itself; the alliance with Ridwan took over the normal functions of a fortress like Alamut in furnishing the da'wa with protection and a base of operations. Aleppo and its districts became the da'wa's field of activity, the city and Ridwan's citadel its refuge, as Mawdud's 1111 campaign clearly demonstrated. Though nothing approaching a fortress, the Nizaris at least had a place of their own in the mission-house or dar al-da'wa granted them by Ridwan. Furthermore, the Nizaris enjoyed a certain status and a significant role in the affairs of the city as Ridwan's proteges; wielding power within the Saljuk-Sunnite establishment may have seemed as gratifying as actually overthrowing it.

Flourishing though it was, the da'wa at Aleppo remained highly vulnerable. The Nizaris were feared and hated by the majority of the population, and only the added support of Ridwan's personal troops

stood between them and bloodthirsty retaliation from their enemies. The only possible justification for the da'wa's persistence with the policy of alliance was the hope that they could prevail upon their patron to cede them fortresses of their own.

This is what emerges as the recurring pattern of Nizari development in Syria in the first three decades of the twelfth century; the calculated gamble that a local alliance such as that with Ridwan would produce tangible benefits before it collapsed and the da'wa lost its temporary source of protection. Whether it can be graced with the title of a policy or a strategy, this was how the Syrian da'wa went about getting itself established.

The gamble was only just beginning to show results at Aleppo, admittedly fairly meagre ones, when Ridwan's death abruptly terminated the alliance. When his successor permitted a violent anti-Nizari reaction shortly afterwards, the da'wa's only acquisition outside the city, the fort of Qal'at ash-Sharif, was too small and too close at hand to withstand the onslaught of the Sunnite ahdath. The vulnerability of the policy of alliance was all too clearly demonstrated.

Yet almost immediately the surviving remnants of the da'wa made a bid to seize another stronghold, at Shaizar, using the Persian Nizari techniques of stratagem and assault employed earlier at Afamiya. Again, the Nizaris showed themselves capable of seizing but not holding a major fortress, though this time the failure is scarcely surprising considering the recent drastic reduction in

Nizari manpower in Syria.

The failure at Shaizar seemed to drain most of the da'wa's surviving vigour, making the Persian strategy of direct castle seizure even more remote of success, so that when the da'wa again revives it is to be observed pursuing the earlier policy of local alliance at Aleppo, now with the Artukid amir Il-Ghazi. The Nizaris had obviously profited from their experience. To avoid overconcentration of their strength in a single vulnerable place, the da'wa now diversified its area of activities, northeastwards into the Diyar Bakir, and southwards to Damascus. This last development shows the da'wa at its most resourceful; using a present alliance as a springboard to another with a more powerful ruler in a much more important city.

The Damascene phase of the Syrian da'wa shows the policy originated at Aleppo at its very best. With Tughtakin's grudging protection and the active support of the wazir Mazdakani, the Nizaris created a strong following within a predominantly Sunnite city and extended their campaign into rural areas as far afield as central Syria.

There are no reports of attempts on castles in this period, and though we cannot expect the chroniclers to notice the day-to-day activities of the da'wa, we may be tolerably sure that striking military action such as this would have been noticed. At Aleppo, the Nizaris asked Il-Ghazi to let them reoccupy Sharif, which he adroitly prevented. At Damascus, what we know of Nizari activity strongly indicates adherence to the policy of alliance, cultivating

the favour of their patron, as in the military action early in 1126, and building up the strength of the following to a point where favours could be asked and granted.

This policy paid off handsomely in 1126 when the Nizaris were given Banyas, and with this fortress as the real centre of the da'wa, the next two years saw the beginnings of further acquisitions in the Jabal Bahra. When the death of Tughtakin in 1128 brought no immediate anti-Nizari reaction in Damascus, the da'wa seemed at last to be permanently established. The policy of alliance had proved its worth.

What wrecked this achievement was an inexcusable military blunder on the part of the chief da'i Bahram, not any defect in the overall strategy of the da'wa. The catastrophe at the Wadi'l-Taim severely weakened the da'wa but did not collapse it. That came when the enemies of the wazir Mazdakani finally persuaded Buri to be rid of him and his Nizari supporters within Damascus.

The 1129 Damascus massacre deprived the da'wa of the resources necessary to hold its recent territorial acquisitions, but the groundwork had been well laid in the Jabal Bahra. The da'wa rebuilt itself by a slow and painstaking process of purchase and arrangement; Qadmus was purchased, al-Khaf was ceded but probably for a consideration, and though Kharibah was seized by assault it was as quickly lost again, to be recovered only by purchase. Masyaf was the first castle taken and held by the Syrian Nizaris using the techniques of stratagem and assault which characterized the Persian da'wa's style

of expansion. This took place nine years after the peaceful acquisition of Qadmus, and twelve years after the débâcle at Damascus.

From this brief recapitulation it should be apparent that the delay suffered by the Nizaris in securing permanent establishment in Syria is attributable not simply to the severity of the orthodox opposition at Aleppo and Damascus but in large part to the method of expansion adopted by the da'wa. The policy of obtaining castles through a pattern of local alliances rather than by direct assault was in its very nature a long-term affair, of waiting, of being useful, of finally asking for favours, always at the risk of interruption, frustration and delay. Yet given the circumstances obtaining in early twelfth century Syria, this was the most sensible course available. Strict adherence to the Persian strategy of castle assault would in all likelihood have bled the da'wa of its strength more quickly than it could be replaced, and led to its early extinction. The policy of alliance at least enabled the da'wa to consolidate a following, so that when catastrophic reverses occurred there were always some surviving elements on which the da'wa could be rebuilt.

The ultimate establishment of the Nizaris in Syria is therefore not merely a reflection of the movement's undoubted resilience, its capacity to endure losses, to pick up the pieces, and start all over again; it is also a vindication of that traditional Isma'ili policy of decentralization which left individual da'was unencumbered with rigid directives, free to formulate their own solutions to the problems of survival and expansion in a new area.

The significance of the Nizaris' role in Syrian affairs mainly concerns the effect they had on the struggle between Muslims and Crusaders. How influential were the Nizaris in this respect? Did their localized activities really have any wider relevance? Did they indirectly assist the Crusaders by keeping Muslim Syria divided? It is easy to assume that the Nizaris must have been a disruptive influence, and therefore contributed to the Crusaders' success in early twelfth century Syria; more than one writer has taken this for granted. Yet were the Nizaris truly disruptive?

Their influence was basically of two kinds; negative, in their elimination of important Muslim leaders, and positive in their policy of local alliances. Their support for Ridwan may not seem tremendous, but it must be remembered that we normally have no means of assessing their numerical strength. What evidence there is suggests that Ridwan found the Nizari alliance extremely useful, and that the Nizaris made a contribution, however large or small, to the survival of Aleppo in its most vulnerable years. The elimination of Janah al-Dawlah of Hims was not in fact a divisive action. It resulted in the assimilation of Hims to the territories of Damascus, a notable reduction of political fragmentation in Syria. True, Afamiya was lost to the Franks in 1106 as a result of an attempted Nizari coup, yet Khalaf ibn Mula'ib had himself been a disruptive force in Syrian affairs. So long as Shaizar remained as a bulwark counterbalancing the Franks at Afamiya, the loss of Afamiya was not perhaps such a high price to pay for the removal of Khalaf.

It is not strictly correct, therefore, to accuse the Nizaris at Aleppo of creating or prolonging Muslim disunity. The disunity was already there, and already deep for purely political reasons. It would of course be absurd to imagine that the Nizaris saw their actions primarily as advancing or retarding the Muslim cause; their motives were thoroughly selfish and opportunistic. Yet the consequences of their actions were clearly not entirely damaging to the Muslim cause. This positive aspect is easily lost sight of because their most direct and powerful influence on affairs was by means of assassinations. Killers they were, yet their support of Ridwan helped give Aleppo more stable and continuous government than it was to enjoy for the next decade and a half.

Even as regards assassinations, only two stand out as exerting a significant influence on the struggle against the crusaders. Both Mawdud and Il-Bursuki were preparing themselves for greater efforts against the crusaders, and their deaths undoubtedly retarded a concerted Muslim response, yet it could also be argued that Bursuki's death hastened Zanki's entry into Syrian affairs and speeded the political unification of Syria. Even had he lived, Mawdud would have had to overcome political disunity before mounting a full-scale offensive on the Crusader states.

In the final assessment, political disunity was a much more important obstacle to the Muslim revanche than religious differences in the Muslim camp, and the Nizaris' detractors have dwelt chiefly upon their divisive influence in the religious rather than the

political sphere. Here, their role seems to have been overestimated. They were vigorous and dangerous, but they were after all only one of many heterodox groups in Syria, and it is not too far-fetched to see the Nizaris as an inducement for Shi'ites and Sunnites to sink their differences, which, as we have seen, were fairly slight to begin with. It is possible that the Nizaris increased Sunnite disdain for the Shi'ites, but in the long run, and especially at Aleppo and Damascus, the Nizaris accustomed the two larger groups to working together against a common enemy. There are no recorded instances of sectarian divisions ever preventing Syrian Muslims from uniting against a serious Frankish threat.

Even these few observations seem to suggest that the Nizaris' role in Syria has been not so much overrated or underrated as simply misunderstood. The legend attached to their popular name still casts a misleading shadow over our estimation of the da'wa, and will continue to do so while the Syrian "Assassins" are given only cursory or incidental treatment. Only by thorough and detailed examination of the surviving evidence will their importance be fully understood. A study as limited in scope as this cannot hope to offer any more than a handful of suggestions. What is needed is an examination of their whole career in Syria, with parallel consideration of their Muslim and Crusader neighbours, to attempt a delicate but necessary task of assessment. This might only reveal that the fragmentary nature of our information prevents any clear statement, but such a study would at least make our guesses better

informed. Until then, historians of the Crusades will doubtless continue either to exaggerate or underestimate the significance of the so-called Syrian "Assassins".

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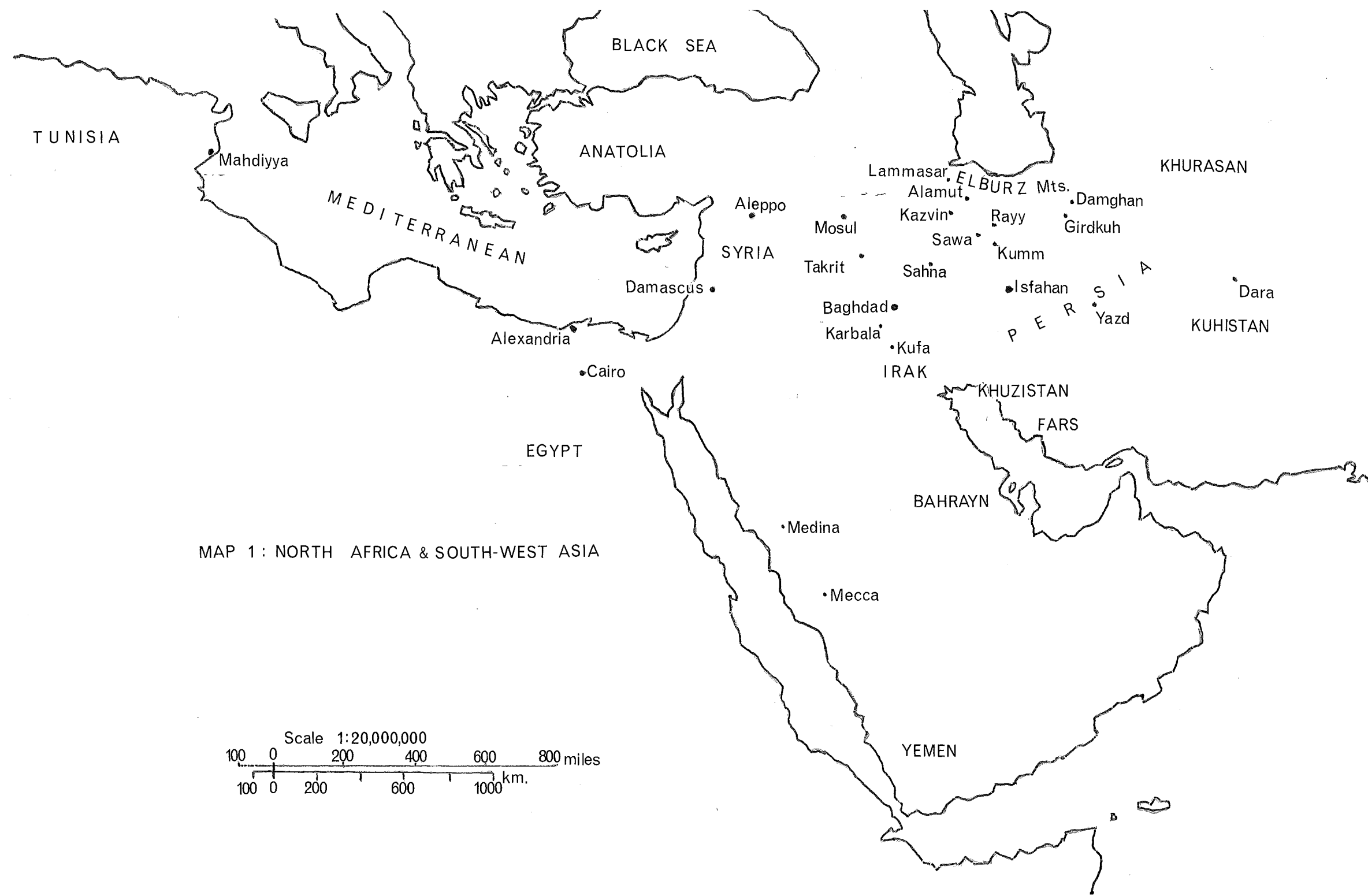
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MAPS



MAP 1: NORTH AFRICA & SOUTH-WEST ASIA

Scale 1:20,000,000
100 0 200 400 600 800 miles
100 0 200 400 600 1000 km.

